

"Driven before the Storm"
by Gertrude Forder





LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
F7582d
v. 1

DRIVEN BEFORE THE STORM.

VOL. I.

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELS

AT ALL THE LIBRARIES.

COURTLEROY. By ANNE BEALE, author of 'Fay
Arlington,' &c. 3 vols.

VICTIMS. By THEO GIFT, author of 'Pretty Miss
Bellew,' 'Visited on the Children,' 'Lil Lorimer,' &c. 3 vols.

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF A LADY, in 1814—
1815—1816. By HAMILTON AIDE, author of 'Rita,' &c. 3 vols.

TILL MY WEDDING-DAY. By a French Lady.
2 vols.

THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA: A MANX
STORY. By HUGH COLEMAN DAVIDSON. 3 vols.

HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

DRIVEN BEFORE THE STORM

BY

GERTRUDE FORDE,

AUTHOR OF

“A LADY’S TOUR IN CORSICA,” “IN THE OLD PALAZZO,”
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1887.

All Rights reserved.

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,
BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON,
Bungay, Suffolk.

823
F7582d
v. 1

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ABOUT THE HERO AND A WAIF	1
II. THE ISLAND OF GOATS	18
III. 'I GUESS YOU'RE TOO SHARP UPON THE MEN'	35
IV. A TUSSELE WITH THE WAVES	69
V. A WINDY WALK	92
VI. AN UNPOPULAR MEMBER OF SOCIETY . . .	133
VII. 'WE PROMISED TO BE FRIENDS'	159
VIII. MISS HOPKINS RECALLS THE PAST . . .	181
IX. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	196
X. JARRING ELEMENTS	215
XI. RECONCILED	226
XII. JUDITH'S LOVER	250
XIII. NELL DOES BATTLE WITH THE MEN OF HER HOUSEHOLD	268
XIV. 'THE CONDITION OF YOUR PECUNIARY AFFAIRS'	284

Given new May 27 Aug 51 G. J. J. 300

DRIVEN BEFORE THE STORM.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT THE HERO AND A WAIF.

‘ But the poor dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his master’s own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone—
Unhonoured falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth !’

BYRON.

THE sky was grey and cloudy, with here and there a patch of chequered blue ; and the Mediterranean lapped lazily upon its level shore in a sort of sullen calm. The afternoon of the April day was drawing to a close in better mood than had been promised by a showery morning ; and, for a

pedestrian in southern Italy, was of quite the right sort—cool, sunless, and picturesque. Such a personage now lay, stretching his long limbs at ease upon the shingle, carelessly digging little holes in the somewhat dirty sand around him—his straw hat flung off, and his short fair hair bared to the pleasant breeze, his blue eyes resting in a half-absent satisfaction upon the lovely scene before him.

An Englishman this tourist, every inch of him, as might plainly be seen, as much from his close-cropped head, clean-shaven chin, and yellow moustache, as from the national cut of the light tweed suit fitting loosely to the broad athletic figure.

Sunset was beginning to creep over sky and sea. The patches of blue spread and deepened, the leaden interstices flushed into a soft pink, and the transformation scene commenced. Vivid bars of crimson and purple spread long arms across the golden

heavens, whilst Ischia and Procida gradually mapped out their indented outlines against a glorified background, and all the bays and promontories of the matchless Gulf of Naples slowly unveiled themselves from the day's jealous mist, and brought themselves to within a stone's throw of the observer, painted in every shade of pink and blue and mauve.

Barrington De Witt was not sentimental, neither was he an artist, but he was a keen appreciator of Nature in her picturesque moods, and his gaze remained riveted upon the scene.

‘What a pity John Pon is not here,’ he muttered to himself; ‘it’s too good to have all to oneself.’

When at length the colours began to fade, he still lay on, partly to enjoy that curious dying-out of sky and sea life, and partly because a good rest was pleasant after the long walk to Baiæ and its environs.

But on removing his gaze he became aware that he was not alone. It was only a dog after all; but De Witt was fond of dogs, and instead of threatening him with stick or stones, glanced amiably towards the poor beast as he came forward timidly, yet with purpose in his eyes, and sat himself down but a couple of yards distant, with faintly wagging tail and a beseeching face. He was a thin and lanky creature, of a kind seldom seen in that part of the world, more of a colley than anything else—evidently a young dog, and one that might possibly, when filled out with food, and washed clean from mud and dirt, attain to good looks. That he was highly intelligent could be seen at once from the expression of his clear brown eyes. De Witt whistled slightly and held out a friendly hand, and in an instant the gaunt creature came forward and licked his fingers.

Reader, if you have ever lived in southern

Italy, you will recognize this as a somewhat extraordinary fact, and understand the attentive scrutiny with which De Witt favoured his new acquaintance. The intelligence and affections of the canine race are not, as a rule, cultivated in those neighbourhoods; and to meet with a dog either wise or caressing, especially an apparently stray and homeless dog, is an incident as rare as astonishing.

‘Where do you come from?’ asked the man; and the dog looked earnestly and lovingly into his face. ‘And what do you want?’ continued Homo. Canis wagged his tail and repeated the lick.

‘Rubbish!’ remarked Homo, ‘don’t tell me. It isn’t love you want; it’s victuals.’

Canis crept a little closer, and wagged his tail a little harder.

‘I do believe,’ observed Homo, ‘that you understand English. I shouldn’t wonder if you were an English dog.’ And Canis

continued the wagging silently, perhaps affirmatively. But there was no doubt as to his sentiments when his companion took a packet of biscuits from his coat-pocket. 'There,' said Homo, 'eat those up, and then decamp.'

The biscuits were devoured hungrily, silently, gratefully; but there was no decamping. Canis remained silently watching his new friend, stretched out beside him as near as he was permitted to come. When at length De Witt rose, shaking the sand from his clothes and preparing to start homewards, he rose too and followed step by step with a determined air.

'Now, look here, old fellow,' said Barrington after a few yards, turning to survey his companion, 'my pockets are empty, there isn't another crumb in my possession. I can't adopt you, neither do I intend to treat you to *table-d'hôte* at the hotel to-night. So suppose you slope it!'

The stray dog looked him in the face unflinchingly. That he understood the purport of De Witt's words and gestures was evident; that he had not the slightest intention of obeying was quite equally evident. Even the threat of the stick or the launching of one or two small stones in his direction failed to move him. He was clearly a dog of a resolute will. Barrington fancied that his eyes filled with a dumb reproach at these repulses, as he withdrew himself to a humbler distance, but these were the barren results of the effort to repudiate his society; and as De Witt turned his back upon the fading glories of the Mediterranean, and toiled up the long steep hill of Posilippo, the thin dusty animal kept its place steadily behind him.

Table-d'hôte was just over by the time De Witt reached his hotel; and, not sorry to miss the long steaming meal, he had a cosy little dinner to himself in one corner of

the long dining-room, issuing an hour later, cigar in mouth, to his favourite bench in the hotel garden—a bench overshadowed by a great chestnut-tree, and looking out upon a wide-reaching view. It was placed not far from the entrance gate; and there—silently, sadly, crouching beside the iron railings, his body without, his nose within, his whole attitude one of humble supplication—sat the poor waif of the Posilippo shore. Every boy who passed pulled his tail, or otherwise insulted him, but he seemed regardless of insult and bereft of fear, as he sat like a dirty canine Peri at the gate of Paradise, watching for his self-chosen benefactor. His tail went round and round as Barrington sauntered forwards, and his eyes never quitted the Englishman as he sat down to enjoy his smoke beneath the trees. De Witt began to feel quite uncomfortable beneath the dog's appealing gaze, and turned his back

upon him as he flung one arm across the rail of the bench, and gazed out upon the surrounding scene. Both sea and sky were now calm and blue; and the Chiaja, lit up by its wide semicircle of lamps, glittered like fairyland around the sleeping bay.

There was a step on the gravel beside him, and he turned his head as the new-comer, a short and wiry man, sprang up and perched himself upon the arm of the bench with crossed legs, like an agile goblin.

‘Back at last!’ remarked the Honourable John Ponsonby, usually called ‘John Pon’ by his intimates—a dark, keen-eyed man, with black hair and moustache, and a hooked nose. ‘Cicero and all the other old blokes at home to receive you at Baia?’

Barrington nodded. ‘It’s the pleasantest day I’ve had since I came south,’ he remarked. ‘I wish you’d been able to come with me, Ponsonby. We had a *tarantella* in a ruined temple.’

‘And all the other touristries, I suppose. But I didn’t come down merely to amuse myself, like you, my dear fellow. I’m a business man; and I must be off to-morrow morning by cockcrow.’

‘To-morrow morning? What a nuisance!’

‘A telegram shortened me up. You’ll be snoring when I depart.’

‘I say, Ponsonby, what am I to do when you are gone? There isn’t a decent man to speak to in the hotel.’

‘Well, they *ain’t* a very juicy lot here, I must say. Suppose you try Capri. I had no end of a jolly three days there before I met you.’

‘There’s nothing but artists and beggar-maids at Capri, is there?’

‘All the better. The artists are pleasant fellows, and the beggar-maids so many hours.’

‘Anything to climb?’

‘Only hills, but one or two stiff ones, and rocks where you might break your neck if you tried hard. A primitive, friendly population, and a tidy little hotel or two.’

‘They dance the *tarantella* all day long there, I suppose? I’ve seen it twice, and that’s about enough.’

‘They make a pause occasionally; and some of them sell coral or drive donkeys.’

‘But I don’t wear coral necklaces, and I don’t like riding donkeys.’

‘Then you can go out boating and risk a drowning. It is rarely calm two days together.’

‘That sounds better,’ remarked Barrington, thoughtfully. ‘I dare say I may go. It doesn’t seem a bad sort of a place for a few days. I wish you could come with me, Pon.’

‘I wish I could; but I can’t. And it wouldn’t suit me to be an idle man.’

De Witt removed his cigar from his

mouth, and slowly turned towards his companion.

‘I seem a lazy sort of a fellow to you, I suppose, Ponsonby?’

The Honourable John shrugged his shoulders lightly, thereby nearly but not quite destroying his balance upon the back of the bench.

‘Well, I’d give any sum to be back in my old profession if I could! It wasn’t my doing that I ever left it.’

‘Of course not.’

‘I’m sick already of hanging about doing nothing, though it’s only a year since my father died.’

‘Then, my dear fellow, hadn’t you better look out for some occupation without loss of time, seeing you may have another forty or fifty years of it?’

‘How can I? I’m not fit for anything else.’

‘You might get something to do if

you didn't want to be paid for it, you know.'

'I don't think I could fancy any other kind of work.'

'H'm—just so. And can't you return to the property and look after that?'

'Impossible, so my lawyers tell me. The estate has got so involved the last few years, that the only hope is for me to live away from it for a time.'

'That's a bore.'

'Yes; not that I'm particularly keen upon country life; but the old place has its attractions. But it's an expensive one to keep up, and my father's horses ran the income down to a low ebb.'

'Well, you must take to painting in water-colours: that's what all the idle men do abroad.'

'I never could put two lines together in my life.'

'I'm afraid the French horn is out of date,

and you are too old for the violin. There's only one thing left for you to do, De Witt. You must fall in love.'

'With a Capri coral girl?'

'I fell in love with all the coral girls there,' remarked Ponsonby meditatively. 'What's that cur doing at the gate-post, I wonder?'

'Followed me from Posilippo.'

Ponsonby whistled, and with one bound the dog leapt in, passing his outstretched hand, however, without notice, and pressing his nose to De Witt's knee.

'Nice dawg, intelligent dawg,' remarked the Honourable John; 'he knows I'm too poor to pay his ticket back to England for him.'

'Then you think he's an English dog?'

'I do. Well, I must turn in now, De Witt, and pack my portmanteau. *Au revoir* to our next meeting in England. When do you think of returning homewards?'

‘Haven’t a notion. When I’m too sick of the Continent to stand it any longer.’

‘That will be very shortly?’

‘Unless I take a trip to California or somewhere.’

‘You couldn’t do better. I wish there was time to get to the Rocky Mountains and back during the vacation.’

De Witt still sat on for some time after his friend left him. Friend he would scarcely have called him in England, for a few chance meetings in society had then constituted the sum of their mutual acquaintance; but ten days spent in a foreign country in the same hotel, chiefly tenanted at the present moment by uncongenial foreigners, had evoked a pleasant liking and a certain amount of intimacy between the two Englishmen. John Ponsonby was so sincere and so straightforward of disposition, as well as so easy and humorous in

conversation, that he was a general favourite with those who knew him.

Presently the city clocks struck out eleven, and there was a sound as of the closing of some of the hotel doors and windows. A waiter who had been hovering about under the trees for the last half hour, enjoying his leisure in the cool night air, approached De Witt politely.

‘Scusi, signor,’ he asked, in his mingled jargon of English and Italian (for he was not the polyglot head-waiter), ‘but that dog—is he of you?’

‘No,’ replied De Witt, half-reluctantly, as the poor beast crept closer to him, as if begging for protection.

‘He is from the street, signor?’

De Witt nodded. And the next moment there was a loud yelp, accompanied by a violent kick from the suave and smiling waiter, as the stray dog was sent flying towards the gate.

‘I say! What are you doing, you brute?’ exclaimed De Witt, jumping up angrily. ‘Don’t kick the dog like that!’

The waiter stared helplessly, in the act of administering a second kick.

‘But what will you, signor? He is only a dog. I have to close the gates.’

De Witt paused a moment; then he called the waif towards him and patted its head.

‘Put him in a stable somewhere,’ he said, slipping a couple of francs into the man’s hand, ‘until to-morrow morning, and give him something to eat.’

The waiter bowed and smiled with civil acquiescence. But the incident of ‘il Signor Capitano Inglese’ and the lost dog did not lose in the telling, and served next day as a prime joke among the hotel servants, to illustrate the imbecilities of a most eccentric insular race.

CHAPTER II.

THE ISLAND OF GOATS.

‘The wind had no more strength than this
That leisurely it blew,
To make one leaf the next to kiss,
That closely by it grew.’—M. DRAYTON.

THE little steamer was slowly ploughing her way from the port of Naples towards the island of Capri. On the deck sat Barrington de Witt, his feet accommodated by a spare chair, a cigar in his mouth, and the lost dog beside him. The latter had gained his point, and was now no longer lost, but a happy and prosperous animal, well fed, well washed, and well combed, supplied with the name of ‘Waif,’ and with a lenient master—and in consequence of all these novel circumstances, acknowledged to

be a proud and handsome dog. Barrington had his Baedeker spread out before him, but he was not studying it—his eyes were fixed, in tranquil enjoyment, alternately upon the dancing waves, and upon a group of his fellow-passengers seated just in front of him.

It was a grand relief, after two dull and soaking days,—when, in the absence of Ponsonby, the hotel salon and smoking-room had become more insufferably dull than ever,—to be out once more under a clear blue sky and on the laughing lively sea. The sea indeed was a little too lively for some of the passengers, who by-and-by grew pale, and began to retire apart, or even to disappear down the narrow stairs which led to the Liliputian black hole below dignified by the name of cabin. De Witt's neighbours, however, were not sea-sick, although one of their party, a stout, motherly-looking woman, seemed to be nervously afraid that she might be going

to be a bad sailor. But perhaps she was induced to be thus timid by the perpetual fussings of her husband, a little elderly man, whose bulk would not have made the half of hers, and who seemed unable to be still for a moment. Although evidently well-to-do people, Barrington recognized them at once as unaccustomed travellers. Not so the two younger members of the party, who seemed quite at their ease, both as regarded fear of the vessel's motion, or of any other incident of travel. It was small wonder that Barrington found his gaze returning again and again towards the group, for two prettier girls it would be difficult to place side by side: one tiny, *spirituelle*, and fair, with that fragile beauty so characteristic of American belles; the other tall, upright, and dark, with a *piquante*, spirited face, and something a little haughty about the firm curves of the fine mouth.

It was easy to see, from the likeness

between them, that this latter was the daughter of the large handsome lady, and equally clear that the little one, who spoke with a marked transatlantic twang, was no relation to either. She was very lively and gay-tempered, this fair American, and her clear high voice fell distinctly upon De Witt's ears, whilst the softer, lower tones of the other girl were comparatively indistinguishable. Before many minutes were over Barrington had possessed himself of the interesting fact that the name of the tall girl was Nell, and that of her companion Blanche; after which, perhaps feeling that he had learnt enough for a passing acquaintance, he closed his eyes and leant back drowsily, with a faint sybaritic enjoyment of pleasant sounds as conveyed in the duet betwixt the plashing wavelets and the fresh young voices. An hour later he was roused by a sudden stir on board, and by the cessation of the steamer's paddles.

‘I dare not go, Edward, indeed I dare not,’ the stout lady was saying, with trepidation in her tones ; ‘I almost wish you and the girls would give it up.’ Which remark was closely followed by exclamations of unqualified disgust from the two girls.

Barrington looked about him, and seeing overhead a great upright mass of brown rock, stretching away into more empurpled hues on either side, he recognized that he was beneath the lee of the rugged Island of Goats. And very goat-like indeed it appeared from the present point of view of perpendicular limestone cliff, where even a goat of moderate accomplishments might have experienced some embarrassment in finding a route upwards.

‘Going to the Blue Grotto, sir?’ inquired the civil captain ; and De Witt nodded and rose, perceiving, as he approached the side of the vessel, that the little fleet of tiny skiffs which swarmed around within the

calm belt of water sheltered by overhanging walls, were already more than half of them occupied, and on their road to the grotto.

‘I’m sure it isn’t safe!’ repeated the lady. ‘How high is the entrance?’ (This to the captain.)

‘Between two and three feet, signora,’ he replied a little impatiently. ‘Come, you must say whether you mean to go or not.’

She gave an exclamation of horror and drew back decisively; but her husband was already upon the ladder, closely followed by the two younger ladies.

‘We are all right, mamma!’ laughed the tall girl. ‘But it’s quite as well you should stay behind; you might upset the boat if you were frightened.’

‘Come, Miss Hopkins,’ said the gentleman, offering his hand to the other, ‘jump in.’ And her friend was proceeding to follow her example, when the boatman interfered with a wave of his hand.

‘Not more than two passengers in each boat; it is not permitted,’ he remarked. And indeed the three persons already embarked seemed fully enough for the frail skiff.

The elderly gentleman seemed terribly put about by this injunction; and it was difficult for De Witt, standing waiting just behind, to restrain a smile at the excited remonstrance he poured forth in a mingled jargon of English and Italian. It was impossible, he seemed to think, or improper, for either of his charges to do without his escort. It was the puzzle of the fox and the goose crossing the stream over again. At length a brilliant idea seemed to strike him.

‘I will take Miss Hopkins first, and then return for you, Nell,’ he remarked to the second girl.

‘Impossible, papa, I should miss it,’ was her reply. ‘The steamer would not wait.

'We are already the last.' And she stepped quietly into a neighbouring boat.

'Nell, come back, I desire !' he exclaimed fussily.

But I am sorry to say the young woman paid no attention to his remonstrances, and merely turned her back upon him. Barrington, slightly raising his hat, followed her ; but as he seated himself in the boat an anxious face peered over the steamer's side.

'I see you are an Englishman, sir,' remarked the lady ; 'do you consider there is any real danger in going to the grotto ?'

'None whatever,' he replied, smiling ; 'I do not think you need be nervous about your daughter, madam.' And the good lady thanked him with a friendly air ; fortunately too short-sighted to be conscious either of the scowls of her little husband or the indignant flush of her independent daughter.

To be seated in the stern of a narrow

boat, closely wedged beside a young and pretty girl, is a sufficiently attractive position to any man not a misogynist; and when to this fact is added that of being a perfect stranger to his fellow-passenger, certainly gains in piquancy. De Witt's companion, however, did not appear to be of a sociable disposition, and kept her head turned away from him, leaving visible only the outline of a rosy cheek and a small pink ear. When, however, they neared the entrance to the grotto, she gave a sudden gasp, and turned towards him. 'Surely we are not going through that hole?' she asked. 'Is it possible to get through?' The opening in the rock did indeed look perilously low and narrow, and Barrington did not wonder at her fears as he observed the swell advancing and retiring, at times almost filling up the small space.

'It is all right,' he replied. 'Every one else has gone through, you see. But,' he

added, 'we will return if you would rather not go in?'

'Oh no, no!' she said, laughing at herself. 'Of course we will go on.'

'Then shut your eyes,' he remarked, with a friendly smile, 'and I will tell you when you are safe inside.'

'Lie down in the boat, signor, signorina,' commanded the boatman; 'lie flat!' And with a little irrepressible smile, half of amusement and half of embarrassment, the two obeyed. The next moment there came an advancing wave, and the boatman seized his oars. On they swept towards the dark slit in the wall, in went the oars, down crouched the pilot, the rocks grated against the boat's sides, and they were in the famous grotto.

'Now get up, signor, signorina!' And, surrounded by darkness, they complied.

'Papa!' she called towards the nearest of the spectral boats with spectral freight

that glided round them, 'is that you and Blanche?'

'Thank goodness we are all safe, yes!' was the reply. 'I nearly lost my scalp in coming in.'

The little American laughed outright. 'You quite pinched the skin off my arm, I know, Mr. Brereton! Oh, Nell, turn round and see the blue at the entrance! Isn't it quite too elegant?'

But Miss Lingwood's admiration was of a less demonstrative nature than that of her friend, though she laughed softly to herself at the little Yankee term; and Barrington, to whose lips the word had also brought a smile, felt a moment's sympathetic link between himself and his companion. This was strengthened by the pretty look of gratitude and graceful bend of the head with which, on emerging once more into daylight, she acknowledged the trifling act of courtesy which had spread his overcoat

as a rug to protect her from the not over-clean bottom of the boat ; and she was quite gracious and conversational during their few minutes' return pull, accepting with another smile the hand he held out to assist her up the vessel's side.

It was a beautiful face, thought De Witt, when so illumined—beautiful not merely with the loveliness of form and colour, but with the nameless attraction of high spirit and strongly-defined character. With the smile faded the best and most winsome part of its beauty—the dark eyes became too cold and searching, the lips too still and proud. He was possibly formulating some such opinion within his mind when some one touched him lightly on the arm, and he became aware that the stout lady was once more claiming his attention.

‘I must thank you for a moment, sir,’ she remarked in a tone half condescending, half friendly, ‘for your kind care of my

daughter. I did not half like her to go into such a wild sort of place without my husband's protection; but with an English gentleman like yourself in the same boat, I felt I need not be anxious about her safety.'

The good woman was certainly grateful for small benefits; barring the spreading of the overcoat and the lending of the hand up and down the vessel's ladder, Barrington was conscious of nothing particularly useful or heroic in his behaviour. But she was probably one of those unaccustomed travellers to whom every Italian appears more or less in the light of a brigand, to whose tender mercies she would tremble to commit the keeping of herself or her child; and since it was her pleasure to be friendly, he had no objection to any little interchange of civilities which might lead to a pleasant acquaintance.

'I fear,' he said as he raised his hat, and involuntarily cast an amused glance

towards the young lady, 'that my care amounted to nothing, but I am very glad I was the means of sparing you anxiety.'

For a moment Miss Lingwood's frank smile replied to his; but the next it faded, and she seemed to retire within herself again.

'There was nothing to take care of, mamma,' she remarked calmly. 'I looked after myself, and this gentleman after himself, and the boatman looked after us both, as he was bound to do,' and she moved away.

Had she a temper, thought Barrington, or was she simply of a sarcastic turn of mind? a reflection in which he was interrupted by the approach of a seedy-looking little man of cadaverous features, who advanced humbly and pushed into his hand a hotel card. He was speedily followed by another, stout and better dressed, who walked forward with a semi-military step, but was swiftly elbowed from his post by a third, so

extremely loquacious in singing the praises of his house, that De Witt, after briefly naming his hotel, turned and fled, walking towards the bows of the vessel and scanning with interest the long steep island, up which wound the white pathway which led to the principal and central village of Capri.

Here he was presently joined by Mr. Brereton, to whom the unwelcome attentions had been transferred.

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed the latter irritably, ‘those fellows are enough to drive one mad! How did you get rid of them?’

‘I named my hotel.’

‘I haven’t a notion which is the best. Can you inform me?’

‘I can’t answer for that; but mine was the one recommended to me by a friend.’

‘Oh, then no doubt it is the best,’ replied his companion, catching eagerly at this straw for relief.

The next moment all was confusion, as

the passengers once more descended into the little boats ; and, amid the wild gesticulations and babel of outcries proceeding from native throats upon the tiny pier, De Witt overheard his new acquaintance repeating the name of his own hotel. Thus he found himself likely to see more of his quartette of fellow-travellers. He had time, however, to notice that whilst Mrs. Brereton turned from him with a good-natured nod, and her husband was by no means averse to a little friendly assistance in his halting Italian, their daughter stood apart, apparently studiously unconscious of his existence. Nor did he meet the ladies again that day ; for, after a hurried luncheon, Waif and his master started for a tour of general inspection round the island, which kept them out till after night had fallen, and the table d'hôte dinner was long over. Then, his solitary repast finished, De Witt lit his cigar and had a

quiet smoke, in which occupation he was presently joined by another guest, some time resident in the house—a tall, consumptive-looking artist, who seemed a simple-hearted, good sort of fellow enough.

CHAPTER III.

‘I GUESS YOU’RE TOO SHARP UPON THE MEN!’

‘Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying.’—ROBT. HERRICK.

THE following day showed the perfection of southern spring climate, and Barrington, who was given to erratic hours, and, when he did not lie over late, sometimes rose very early, was up and out of the house before any of its other occupants had put in an appearance to breakfast. During the two or three hours that had elapsed, he and Waif had made acquaintance with a wide semicircle of cliff scenery, and were now half-way up the path leading towards Lo Capo.

It seemed to have struck both simultaneously that the sun was hot, and that a pause was desirable; and for the last quarter of an hour they had been reclining side by side upon the broken remains of a ruined fern-covered wall,—blue sea on every side of them,—Barrington's hat tilted over his eyes, and his head comfortably pillowed on the dog's soft coat. He had gradually fallen into a half-sleepy reverie of many things and persons—a reverie only sometimes interrupted by the intrusion beneath the straw brim of his hat of a long black nose and a pair of wistful eyes, apparently apologetically curious to know the subject of his musings. Somehow De Witt's mind had gone back to past days. It was all very jolly here now—there was nothing to complain of in life just at present, with this glorious sky overhead, these incomparable rocks all round, and—‘Get off, Waif! don't lick my nose, you brute!’—

the possibilities of agreeable society to be had ; but, hang it ! even skies and rocks and pleasant society grow monotonous to some men after a time, with nothing in the future to break a horizon of monotony. Oh, for the old times, the happy days of regimental life ! If only he had never left the service ! How little he thought when, one glaring day at Aldershot, he received the doctor’s letter, begging him to obtain leave and come down at once to his father, stricken by a severe stroke of paralysis, that he should never return thither as a member of the camp, never rejoin the regimental mess, squeeze his big bath into the tiny hut room, or march among his comrades over the parched grey dust that carpets the ground of that dried-up district.

In truth, De Witt had been somewhat hardly treated by his father. Never of a very unselfish disposition, or disposed to

consult over-much the feelings of those about him, the old man, when struck down in the hunting-field, laid prostrate, and debarred from the one occupation to his mind worth living for, became querulously determined to keep fast hold of the only person who could be found to relieve the dulness of this unaccustomed confinement. A fox-hunting, country-bred squire of the old, almost extinct type, Mr. De Witt had never felt either the inclination or the necessity for mental culture, and rarely turned a page except those of his 'Sporting Times' or 'Field.' Music and art were to him dead letters, the sound of the horn, the only note for which he cared, and the points of a well-bred horse, his only definition of the lines of beauty. He had made no objection to his son entering the army, although he would perhaps have preferred to keep him loafing about the premises at Hadley Hall, and thought him a fool to

want further interests in life than those supplied by the field and the race-course, with the ambition of a future M.F.H.ship ; but now that he lay paralyzed, a log of inactivity, he was not going to part with his only son ; Barry must be at his beck and call, must visit the hunters daily, see after that clever knave of a head groom, Finchley, and read him the latest news of the sporting world, from which he found himself so suddenly and irretrievably banished.

Barrington had acquiesced good-humouredly enough at first in the programme ; he was sorry for the old man, and, although they had not an idea in common, he was his father, and in a pitiable condition. When, however, month after month stretched on, and the leave was again and again applied for and extended, he began to grow very weary of his post, and to suggest a change of plans. But this movement on his part was met by a

startling announcement from the elder man. Mr. De Witt informed his son that he never meant him to rejoin so long as he himself were living. And a quarrel nearly ensued—as nearly as was compatible with Barrington's easy temper, and his father's desire not to rouse him into an open defiance, and so to lose his point. To prevent this, he adopted a fretful and complaining tone.

‘You can do what you like when I am gone,’ he said. ‘I shan't trouble you long. Can't you give up your own way for a few months?’

And the young man found himself forced to accede, with a suspicion that began to be certainty how it would end. When, however, the final notice came, that leave could no longer be renewed, and that he must either return to his duties or retire, Barrington once more approached the old man, determined to fight a battle for his profession. Needless to say, he retired worsted. A

father against a son, selfish obstinacy against a yielding, kindly nature, was sure to win the day. Even had Barrington decided upon open rebellion, the elder De Witt held the purse-strings, he was absolutely dependent upon him, and could scarcely manage to exist solely upon his pay. But he never thought of rebelling against him. He merely received in silence the old man’s closing remark, ‘ You’ll be glad to see me in my grave, I dare say ! ’ and then with a sore heart sat down to send in his papers.

Perhaps the most trying part of the business was, that the sacrifice seemed after all so unavailing, and that before another six months were over, the squire had gone to join a race of fox-hunting forefathers in the family vault at Hadley village church.

And thus at seven-and-twenty Barrington had found himself alone in the world, professionless and homeless,—for he was

advised to leave the impoverished family seat to recoup its income by a timely economy,—and comparatively friendless amongst a set of dull country people who had been civil enough, but whom he found for the most part thoroughly uncongenial.

The six hunters were sold, all except one which he kept for a time for his own use; the two racers in course of training at a celebrated training stable in the next county were likewise disposed of, the servants paid off, and De Witt said good-bye to Hadley, and went up to town with a very hazy idea as to what to do with himself. In town he knocked up against a good many of his former fellow-officers, and the sight of them did not tend to allay the irritable disgust with which he contemplated his own resignation. This was indeed the second great trouble of his life, and eventually drove him abroad to seek distraction in foreign life and travel.

The only other trouble he had ever experienced in the course of a pleasant easy existence had been the loss of his mother. Fifteen years ago it was now, but every detail of her death and illness was as firmly fixed in his memory as if it had happened yesterday. His father had never been much to him, as boy or man; but his beautiful young mother he had adored whilst living, and still worshipped in memory. Graceful, sparkling, and accomplished, her match with the good-looking, one-idea’d sportsman, so greatly her inferior, was a matter of astonishment to all her friends; yet they always appeared to be a happy couple, and if Mr. De Witt had ever cared unselfishly in his life, it had been for his spirited, delicate bride. She had been a good and affectionate wife, but it was clear to every one that her heart was chiefly bound up in her boy, the only child of their marriage, and who, both in physiognomy

and disposition, resembled herself rather than his father.

At the time of her death, Barrington had been but thirteen, the shyest and most awkward of ages,—the age when a boy may feel, but cannot express his feelings,—and perhaps no one amongst the mourners gathered together at the funeral had guessed how sore was the heart of the big, silent, unfriendly boy who so sullenly refused all advances to draw him into conversation. None perhaps, save one, who, by her warm, loving sympathy, had become from that date his dearest friend, his woman confidante. This was Aunt Judith ; or, to give her her full title, Miss Judith Collyer. Miss Collyer was not very old even now,—decidedly upon the sunny side of forty,—but at the time of her sister's death she had been quite a young girl, not more than one or two and twenty. She bore a great resemblance to her elder sister, who perhaps had

been the more beautiful and *spirituelle* of the two, whilst Judith was the more graceful and *piquante*. Her intelligence was keen, and her tongue ready, but rarely sharp; and to a natural reticence of disposition, she joined unusual powers of discriminating the character of others. She had but few friends of her own sex, but those staunch ones; whilst her ready wit and pleasing presence made her many admirers amongst the other, notwithstanding a little trick she had of making fun of them before their faces.

Aunt Judith it was who had followed the lonely boy where he lay outstretched, miserable and tearless, after his mother’s funeral, in an out-of-the-way part of the garden; had asked him no questions, made no preliminary remarks, but had probed the child’s stricken heart at once, and joined its sorrow to her own; sitting beside him on the ground, stroking the ruffled hair, as,

with the tears running down her own smooth pale cheeks, and her large bright eyes full of tenderness, she talked to him softly of his mother, of his own trouble, and of his future life, until the flood-gates were opened, and he sobbed out his first bitterness with his head upon her knee.

By nature Aunt Judith was shy, but she had said things then which the boy had never forgotten, and which, planted as they were in the impressionable soil of sorrow, had perhaps helped to mould his character in after years, and to keep it free from some of those grosser sins which are likely to assail a man, young, attractive, and independent. He was thinking of Aunt Judith now as he leant against the Capri rocks, and somehow the remembrance of her brought before him the face of his yesterday's companion in the Blue Grotto. Something there undoubtedly was akin in the two countenances; probably

in the lines, sweet, but a little scornful, as if impatient of the humbug of the world, about the lips of both.

But at this moment Waif suddenly raised his head and stood at attention, hearing the approach of passers-by. And the next moment they appeared upon the scene, in single file upon the narrow rocky path; and De Witt pushed his hat from his brows and sat up. First came Miss Hopkins, the young American, seated not ungracefully upon a large donkey, and in full flow of a vigorous flirtation with the consumptive artist, Mr. Wallace; next, Mrs. Brereton, escorted by a handsome, smiling donkey-woman, whose whacks upon the broad back of the beast of burden seemed as constant as they were necessary; and last of all, her daughter, likewise on donkey-back, and followed by Mr. Brereton and another woman-driver.

All the party greeted De Witt after some fashion; the donkey-women grinned and

smiled their sweetest at him out of rich brown eyes; the little American gave him a coquettish glance, whilst her companion nodded in a friendly manner, and Mrs. Brereton asked him if he were bound in the same direction as themselves.

It was decidedly to De Witt's credit that he was able at one and the same moment to reply to this question, to acknowledge the artist's nod, and also to observe Miss Lingwood sufficiently closely to perceive that, whilst bending her head in an infinitesimal amount of recognition, a slight flush swept over her cheek.

A few moments later the party had rounded the corner and were out of sight, and De Witt, who was always rather chary of thrusting himself upon the notice of new acquaintances, continued his reverie for another quarter of an hour before moving in the same direction. When he did so, he walked on to the top of the hill,

passing the others, who had digressed towards the so-called Tiberius’ Tower at the foot of the eminence. Just as he reached the summit, however, he stumbled up against Wallace the artist, standing supporting himself against a rock. His face was ghastly white and his breath laboured.

‘ It’s all right,’ he said with a faint smile, as De Witt approached. ‘ I ran up the slope too quickly, that’s all.’ And he paused to take breath again. ‘ You haven’t got such a thing as a drop of brandy about you, have you ?’

De Witt pulled a flask from his pocket, and pouring some cherry brandy into the cup, held it towards the other.

‘ Thanks ; I’m getting all right now. My heart’s a bit weak, you see ; I mustn’t go the pace up-hill.’

‘ Do you often have these attacks ?’

‘ Pretty often, if I’m not careful. I generally take something with me, but I

forgot it to-day. You see I'm a consumptive sort of fellow. When I first came here, a year ago, the doctors wouldn't promise me six months' lease of life; but Capri's done me no end of good, and now they give me several years. I shouldn't wonder myself if I cheated them yet out of a score.'

'Not if you run up-hill.'

'No, I'm a fool to forget that. But, lord! if you could only have heard me coughing when first I came here. I scarcely ever stopped, and the man in the next room to mine complained he couldn't get a wink of sleep all night. Now I only have half-an-hour or so every morning when I get up. You've got that room now. Did you hear me this morning?'

'A little,' replied De Witt, smiling at his companion's simplicity. 'But why aren't you with the others?'

'Well, you see, Miss Hopkins left her

parasol somewhere on the grass up here, and sent me after it; and I didn’t want to keep her waiting. And now, after all, I have never found it, and she will be wondering why I don’t turn up.’

‘Sit still quietly, and Waif and I will find it for you.’ And De Witt started off.

‘Here, Waif, good fellow, hunt about, and bring what you find!’

In another two or three minutes he had returned, and was beside the artist again.

‘I’ve seen the chapel and the hermit, and Waif has found the parasol, so we haven’t wasted time, have we? Would you like an arm?’

‘Oh, no; I’m as right as a trivet now, and much obliged to you for everything. I say, you won’t say anything about my going queer, will you?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘That hermit fellow’s a humbug, do you

know? He puts on his cassock and his long face for the summer visitors only. In private life he's a shoemaker, and as jolly as any other man.'

'Ah! then I'm glad I hadn't time to listen to his twaddle. I was in hopes humbug hadn't spread to Capri yet.'

'Don't you think it's everywhere?' asked the young artist, with a boyish earnestness that made his companion smile.

By this time they were nearing the bottom of the slope and the Tiberius Tower, and whilst Mr. Wallace hastened to restore her lost sunshade to the fair American, Barrington was accosted by Mrs. Brereton, always the most socially-disposed of the party.

'Excuse me,' she said, after exchanging a few commonplaces on the subject of the scenery and the climate, 'but Mr. Wallace, who was so good as to offer to show us the way to this place to-day, mentioned your

name incidentally just now, and I must ask if you have any connections in Somersetshire?’

‘My father’s first cousin lives there.’

‘At Rolston Court?’

‘The same.’

‘Dear me! We know Sir Simon quite well; intimately in fact. How small the world is! How strange it would have been if we had met you there! for I suppose you have stayed there sometimes?’

‘I have paid one or two visits; but my father and he were not very congenial spirits. My father was all for horses, and Sir Simon is a bookworm.’

‘A very hospitable and agreeable bookworm. Then your father is dead, Captain De Witt?’

‘A year ago, madam.’

‘I must introduce myself and my husband to you. Edward, Captain De Witt is a cousin of our old friend, Sir Simon.’

‘The introduction comes rather late,’ remarked her husband, in what was intended for a pleasant manner; ‘for Captain De Witt and I have already had one or two conversations, and I was indeed indebted to him for the name of our hotel.’

Talk now flowed briskly, but was not joined in by Miss Lingwood, who sat a little apart on the short tufted grass, her eyes fixed upon the sapphire sea, apparently unconscious of anything except its gleaming, sparkling beauty.

When the word for returning was given, the procession started in different wise from that maintained in going, for both girls declared that they preferred descending on foot, and Mr. Brereton, who remarked that the sun was a little too much for him, mounted his step-daughter’s donkey. Miss Hopkins and her artist admirer led the way, and were soon out of sight; Mr. and Mrs. Brereton followed each other

somewhat nervously down the stony way, and De Witt naturally imagined that Miss Lingwood’s society would fall to his share. He was wrong, however, for she engaged herself in a halting conversation with one of the laughing donkey-women, whilst her mother absorbed his own attention.

They were more than half-way home when Mrs. Brereton gave a sudden cry. ‘Oh, that foolish girl! She puts my heart in my mouth. How I wish she would not climb such places! I am sure she risks her neck,’ and she pointed to where her daughter stood upon a pinnacle of rock some little distance off, showing against the clear blue horizon like a lithe young statue on a pedestal.

‘She is not safe,’ remarked her husband; ‘I had better go after her. What a worry these girls are! Why can’t you make them behave sensibly, Lucia?’

But Lucia was too anxious to take any notice of this reproof.

‘Nonsense, Edward, you can’t go, you would lose your head directly at that height! You know you can’t climb.’

‘Let me go,’ said De Witt, though suspicious that the young lady might bestow a snubbing upon him in return for the proffered assistance; and his offer was accepted with gratitude.

‘Have you a strong head, Captain De Witt? You have no idea the places that child gets to.’

Barrington restrained a smile with difficulty.

‘I think I feel competent to scale that rock,’ he replied soberly.

He was soon at the foot of the peak. On seeing him approach Miss Lingwood had at first commenced descending, but after a moment or two had paused, and returned to her former position, whence she sat,

eyeing him curiously with a flushed, half-laughing face.

‘I am sent to assist you down,’ he remarked, as he swung himself up beside her ; ‘ your parents are unhappy about your safety.’

‘ My parent, if you please.’

‘ I beg your pardon ? ’

‘ My parent. Mr. Brereton is my step-father.’

‘ Indeed. But he is anxious too. But I did not suppose you would accept any assistance.’

‘ Then you are wrong.’

‘ Indeed ? Then I am glad I came.’

‘ Did you think I should be annoyed by your coming ? ’

‘ I thought it—just possible.’

‘ So I probably should have been if I could have managed it alone. But I couldn’t, you see. I tried, and failed. I confess the humiliating truth—I got frightened, and my knees shook.’

How charming she looked now as she smiled her frank full smile, her eyes sparkling with fun, and her face lit up with amusement! De Witt with difficulty restrained himself from saying so; and he was mentally comparing her with the silent impassive girl of a few minutes ago, when she roused him by a sudden exclamation.

‘How I wish I were a man!’

‘*I* don’t,’ he replied, with a friendly smile that spared him the rebuff such a speech from any other might have elicited from Nell Lingwood. ‘But why?’

‘Oh, because it is such a horrid shame that everything pleasant should be right and easy to men, which is difficult and improper for women. Look at the way you swung yourself up here, just like—like—’

‘Like a big kangaroo,’ he suggested.

‘Well, like a kangaroo then. And look at my idiotcy—unable to go down without help.’

‘YOU’RE TOO SHARP UPON THE MEN!’ 59

‘What should you have done if I hadn’t come after you? Called for assistance?’

‘Never! I would have sat here all night first. I should have tried to get down, and probably fallen.’

‘Good heavens! You would have broken your neck.’

‘Well, if I had, it’s my own neck. But we must be descending now.’

‘Wouldn’t you like first to go up to the very top, as you are so fond of climbing? It would not take us long.’

Miss Lingwood laughed. ‘If mamma only guessed that you were tempting me on to further heights instead of bringing me down!’

‘It is very wrong of me, I know,’ said De Witt, with an air of comic enjoyment.

‘But I can’t say no!’

The summit was reached in safety, and then the bottom regained; and, whether it were that admiration which a steady

eye, a strong arm, and a light foot invariably rouses in a girl's breast, or from any other cause, De Witt's companion showed no further signs of wanting to run away from him, but walked beside him in friendly chat.

'You are a good climber, Captain De Witt. Have you ever done any Alps?'

'A few; but I have travelled but little till the last year. I never was abroad before, except as a small boy to a German school.'

'And yet you speak Italian so well.'

'One can't help speaking Italian. The people are so sympathetic, and their faces so expressive, that one can almost understand them without words.'

'Are you very fond of Italians?'

'Yes, I like them. They are so warm-hearted, so friendly.'

'But do you care for friendliness that means nothing?'

‘I don’t think it means nothing. One doesn’t want deep and lasting sentiments for every-day trifles, but one likes good-humoured sociability.’

‘Those people would do nothing for you if you really wanted help.’

‘I don’t know that. I don’t see myself why pleasant civil persons should be of a more selfish mould than grumpy ones.’

Miss Lingwood laughed. ‘Do you call the English a grumpy nation, Captain De Witt?’

‘Abroad you usually meet with two varieties—the loud obtrusive specimen, and the stiff, *noli-mi-tangere*.’

‘I know it used to be said that the English Mees abroad was a starched, stuck-up creature, but my experience now is, that most of those one meets on the Continent are extremely free-and-easy, not to say fast girls.’

‘Yes, there are a good many of that sort.

But there are still some who remind one of Edmond About's English heroines in "Le Roi des Montagnes."

'Yes,' she said, with a mischievous smile, 'or of the young lady who was wrecked off the coast of Malabar.'

'What did she do?'

'The steamer she was on ran upon the rocks somewhere, and the passengers' lives were in danger. She was terribly frightened, and flung her arms round one of the ship's officers, imploring him to save her. This he did, jumping into the sea with her, and swimming with her to land. But the next morning when he met her again, and hoped she was none the worse for her terrors of the previous day, she put up her eyeglass and remarked that she was not aware that she had had the pleasure of an introduction.'

The story was well told, and Barrington, amused to see how soon she had dropped

her first armour of unsociability, could not help wondering whether the little flush that had risen to her cheeks during the narration were due to a consciousness that the cap in any fashion fitted her own head. Certainly there was little or no stiffness about her now; she seemed completely to have thrown off the somewhat chilling reserve which had before characterized her, and was so pleasant a companion, that he was conscious of a slight feeling of annoyance at the sight of Mr. Brereton, still mounted upon his ass, patiently waiting for them at a turn of the road.

‘You were so long I began to fear something might have happened,’ he remarked. ‘I suppose it was a steep place to come down? Your mother is gone on, Eleanor; she is quite over-tired with this dreadful road and the shaking of the donkey’s step.’

Barrington could not resist stealing a

glance towards his companion during the first part of this sentence, perceiving, as he did so, a corresponding gleam of amusement on her features, which she vainly endeavoured to conceal from him. During the rest of the way home, however, Miss Lingwood resumed her conversation with Rafaella, the donkey-girl, whilst De Witt strolled on beside her stepfather, cigar in mouth.

He found the little salon empty when he entered it dressed for dinner, and sitting down to the piano, amused himself by strumming various old airs, and singing a snatch of song now and then in a fair baritone. He had not much voice, but he had a great deal of taste. He looked up as the door opened and Miss Lingwood entered, followed by her friend. The latter appeared to have partially resumed her defensive armour during the two or three hours that had elapsed since the return from her walk, but she was not quite proof

against the genial smile with which De Witt greeted their entrance, and she sat down not far from the piano.

‘Don’t stop—don’t get up,’ exclaimed Blanche Hopkins, as he rose from the piano; ‘it’s quite a pleasure to hear any one sing or play decently. There wasn’t a soul with a note of music in them at our hotel in Naples. Was there, Nell?’

Miss Lingwood nodded assent, and De Witt continued his playing, this time, however, breaking into one of the new, pathetic waltz tunes, that, as Blanche Hopkins said, ‘just set her wondering always whether to cry or to dance,’ and led to an animated discussion between herself and him as to the different merits of the ‘Boston,’ the ‘Liverpool lurch,’ and the ‘Swing.’ In the midst of which the rest of the company dropped in, and the young artist squeezed himself into a low chair beside the pretty American and joined in the argument, until the

announcement of dinner caused a general break-up, and De Witt found himself seated between Miss Lingwood and a fat Russian smelling strongly of hair-grease.

Eaves-dropping is a shocking and dishonourable practice; no gentleman could plead guilty to so low a misdemeanour. Yet there are circumstances under which the most innocently-intentioned of persons overhear remarks of a private nature, possibly referring to themselves.

Such was the case with De Witt that evening, as he sat upon the stone balustrade of a little balcony leading out of one of the sitting-rooms, about eleven o'clock. It was a warm beautiful night, the stars were brilliant and the air breezeless, and he did not realize how near he was to some of the bedroom windows, until a girlish voice suddenly struck upon his ear.

‘I do wish, Blanche,’ it said gravely, ‘that you would not flirt so much. It’s

somebody fresh at each place. *Now* it’s that poor young artist.’

‘Don’t *you* talk, my dear! Didn’t you scramble up that great rock on purpose for handsome Mr. Longlegs to fetch you down?’

There was a real annoyance in Miss Lingwood’s tone as she replied :

‘You know, Blanche, that is not true! You *know* I climb everywhere, and, if I had thought he was coming, should have stopped below. I have had enough and too much of that sort of thing, and am sick of it. It all disgusts me now I know what it is worth.’

‘Oh, my dear, you’re too sharp upon the men. I guess they are not all liars, though David did say so.’

‘I think they are all self-interested.’

De Witt fancied he detected a note of sadness in the girl’s voice, as, motioning in silence to Waif, he moved away guiltily to

the other end of the terrace, instinctively wondering what mournful experience could have instilled suspicions so uncomplimentary to his sex in the breast of a young and handsome woman.

CHAPTER IV.

A TUSSLE WITH THE WAVES.

‘ And I have loved thee, Ocean ! and my joy
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
Borne, like thy bubbles, onward : from a boy
I . . trusted to thy billows far and near,
And laid my hand upon thy mane—as I do here.’

BYRON.

THE acquaintance between De Witt and the Brereton party rapidly ripened. The artist too was generally to be found hovering somewhere in the vicinity of Miss Hopkins ; and on the occasion of any long expedition, shared with the other the care of arranging and providing for its success. The guests in the house were fewer than usual, and were not an interesting set.

There were two or three Russians, a loud-voiced party of muscular Germans, male and female, and a low-church English parson and his pale-looking, depressed wife and daughter; besides a newly-married couple, who usually had their meals by themselves, rarely entered the public sitting-room, and seemed to regard their fellow humans as monsters to be avoided or glanced at suspiciously without words. Under these circumstances, according to the rule of mutual attraction, the agreeable members of the party naturally gravitated towards each other and formed a sociable quintett, only slightly disturbed by the prim and fussy tendencies of Mr. Brereton, who was a far more strict and efficient chaperone than his wife, and was sometimes, De Witt fancied, a little too much inclined to give prominence to that onerous position.

The daily scrambles were now generally undertaken by the four young people

together, Mr. Brereton making a bad fifth, and the evenings spent together, round the little tuneless piano, in the rendering of music, vocal and instrumental, more or less successful.

After a week, however, of idyllic calm and sunshine, the weather suddenly changed, and the true April climate began to declare itself. The sea rose into green, foam-tipped mountains, and dashed with a noise of thunder on to the Marina or against the rocky cliffs; and the winds howled and raged from every quarter, sweeping across the island and meeting in a fury on the narrow saddle that ran down its centre. The little diurnal steamer appeared no more, no fresh tourists arrived, and those that were already in the hotels found themselves condemned to an exile of uncertain duration from the mainland. Mrs. Brereton and her two charges took the matter very philosophically. The elder lady got out her crewel work and touched up her sketches

under Wallace's assistance, and the two girls sang duets and dried seaweeds; but Mr. Brereton was not so patiently disposed.

It was about the time fixed for their return to Sorrento, and he became nervous and irritable at the delay, doing his best to rouse the same feelings in the placid breast of his wife. As day by day the storms continued, his discontent increased, and displayed itself in an acerbity of temper that made him far from an agreeable companion, and must have been very trying to the amiable partner of his life. In plain words, Mr. Brereton *nagged*, a process which only induced an additional deference and submission from his gentle spouse (with perhaps now and then a furtive tear or two), but which the two girls appeared to treat with indifference that bespoke a certain amount of mild contempt.

Just about this time, Barrington began to notice that there was not any very large

amount of devotion existing between Miss Lingwood and her step-father. He was extremely careful of her, and, as a rule, outwardly polite to her ; but there was evidently little real cordiality between them, and more than once, after one of the former's querulous outbreaks, De Witt had caught her eyes fixed upon her mother for a moment pitifully, and then turned towards him with a look not unlike scornful dislike. Nell Lingwood, he felt, was not one to be chary in the distribution of her feelings ; her emotions were all well accentuated ; were she to love, she would do it with all her heart ; were she to dislike, there would be no doubt about the matter.

For his part De Witt had no objection to the change in the weather. It would have been a pity to break up so pleasant a party so soon, as would have been done by a return to the mainland, and it was interesting to see the little island lashed

into such a condition of elemental fury. He had rather a weakness for storms himself, and enjoyed fighting his way along the narrow paths at the risk of being blown over the cliffs; or lying on the seashore watching the advancing waves as they flung their sheet of spray over Waif and himself. One might get tired of this sort of thing; but for a few days it was very pleasant. And it was nice, after such an afternoon's solitary battling with wind and rain, to take off one's drenched things, have a good wash, and come in, feeling clean and civilized again, to the quiet, brightly-lit salon, and an evening of music and merry talk.

One morning Barrington rose early and made his way down to the Marina before any one else in the house was up or about. The wind was blowing fiercely, but the sky was almost clear, and, for the first time for a week, there was no rain falling.

Rough as it was, the post-boat, an ordinary rowing boat, was, as he expected, preparing to start to the mainland to fetch the letters. There was a little demur amongst the men as Barrington made his request to be taken amongst them, but a gratuity settled the question, and he stepped on board. Certainly, had the swarthy crew guessed that no pressing business, but simply pleasure, called him with them, they would have expressed still more volubly their sense of his foolhardiness in joining their trio.

‘You mustn’t mind a good tossing, signor,’ remarked the captain of the boat; ‘it’s a bad day, and going to be worse. I don’t much like the going myself.’

De Witt glanced at his dog, who was preparing to follow him, and suddenly motioned him back.

‘Right, signor,’ said the man; ‘no room for dogs to-day. You must sit as still as a mouse.’

Barrington smiled. He could not have explained the instinct that made him unwilling to risk his faithful canine friend in an adventure about which he had no fears for himself.

‘Back, Waif! Go home, good dog!’ he shouted to the unwilling animal; and, for the first time since he had come into his master’s keeping, Waif deferred obedience.

‘Back, Waif! Do you hear what I say? This moment, sir! Home!’

And a miserable, tail-drooping dog, after one last long appealing look towards the boat and its beloved contents, turned sadly away from the pier and went up the hill. Poor Waif! who knows his trouble in that moment? How could he tell that his lord would ever return from that watery expedition to rejoice his loving eyes? How could he tell he was not once more a deserted and masterless dog? But I think he knew better than that; I think a short

acquaintance with De Witt had taught him that the latter was not one to desert his friends ; and if he went up-hill with a sad heart and dispirited mien, it was because he feared that rising treacherous sea, and would have preferred to share its peril with his idol.

Meanwhile, Barrington and his three companions were indeed having a tossing, and progressed but slowly, owing to the impossibility of employing much sail in such a gale. The boat was remarkably sea-worthy, and the captain of the crew experienced and skilful, yet the trip was not wholly without danger, and was certainly one which no other craft save the post-boat would have undertaken in such weather. To De Witt it was all pure enjoyment ; there was nothing he liked better than a good buffeting out at sea ; and as the great waves rose up on all sides, covering him with spray and threatening to

engulf the boat, he flung his hat under the seat and looked around him rejoicingly.

The Capri sailors were certainly no cowards, or they would not have gone out that day, but the pleased expression of the Englishman's countenance was by no means reflected upon theirs ; and, as they toiled slowly on, their features grew longer and more anxious, and they regarded the stranger with astonished and half-indignant eyes. Suddenly came two seas that, notwithstanding the careful steering of the captain, swept the boat nearly broadside on, and more than half filled her with water ; and for a moment all three men turned white and ejaculated to their saints, before putting themselves to the work of baling out.

'Let me have the oars,' said De Witt, quietly creeping on to one of the rowing seats ; 'it is only fair to take my turn.' And the captain, who would have demurred, desisted when he perceived that the new

oarsman pulled with a strong, steady stroke through the boiling sea.

Meanwhile, Barrington was aware of a little movement amongst the men, and discovered that a box was being handed round, into which each put a donation for the benefit of the Madonna, in the way of pledging her present protection. They cast one dubious glance towards him, and then, seeing how usefully he was engaged, replaced the box silently beneath the seat, and attended themselves once more to business. In another few minutes they had safely turned the corner of the last Capo, and were rowing into Sorrento in comparatively smooth water.

‘You row well, signor,’ said the polite captain, showing two lines of white teeth in his satisfaction, as at length all four sprang out upon the little pier, shaking the wet off their clothes like so many newfoundlands; ‘but we shall have an easier time of it going

back. Cospetto! we were nearly swamped this time. But the wind is going down already, and is in our favour returning.'

He was quite right; the return journey was a far less exciting one; the wind was abating, and was not too much to fill the sails satisfactorily, and to send the boat along at a rattling pace, rising gallantly to the helm and dipping her prow gaily in the pure green waves as she cut a way through the foam-covered surface. There was no talk about the Madonna's box this time, and perhaps Geronimo or Ignazio began to feel a lurking suspicion that they had been too generous, and that ten centissimi might have done as well as the half-franc they had been foolish enough to put in. If they did so, however, it was not for long. A rough sea and a chopping wind always make it a case of touch and go in an open sailing boat, and a moment's carelessness at any time is quite enough to prove fatal. So it

was in this case. They were not far from the home landing stage, and all but beneath the shadow of the Capri cliffs, when a sudden squall caught them—a rush of wind from a new quarter, howling down from between one of the rocky gullies.

‘Loosen!’ shouted the captain to the man who was holding the sheet in his hand, but both were a moment too late. The gust caught the sail almost taut, and in an instant heeled the boat over; whilst the sailor, losing his balance, clung to the line instead of letting go. In another second the boat had capsized, and its four occupants were in the water. Fortunately all could swim; and as the craft was fairly bottom upwards, and none entangled, all could and did grasp its keel firmly. Barrington gave one of the men, who seemed less ready than the rest, a helpful shove; and then, seeing that all were safe, cast a glance in the direction of the shore.

‘Coraggio!’ exclaimed the captain at the same moment, ‘they are coming to our assistance.’ And De Witt heard the reassuring shouts, and now and then saw, above the moving waves, two punts coming swiftly towards them. It was as well; for in this sea it would have been impossible to right their own boat, and hazardous to swim through the surf that broke upon the shore. It was difficult enough, as it was, to take breath between the sheets of spray that broke incessantly above their heads across the boat. But first, before the two punts could reach them, arrived at the scene of action a black object, that made straight for Barrington, and paused beside him at his order.

‘Back, Waif—down, sir!’

How poor Waif managed to be the first we must proceed to explain.

When at breakfast time, he, contrary to custom, appeared alone with a sad and

dejected countenance, and the meal was finished without the appearance of his master, one or two persons inquired the reason why, particularly young Wallace, who questioned the hotel-keeper.

‘Well, signor,’ said the latter, ‘I think the Signor Capitano must be gone over in the post boat; for his dog came up alone from the direction of the shore, and there is certainly no other boat that would put across in this sea.’

A little further questioning in the village soon elicited the fact that De Witt had so done; and the artist returned, decidedly put out.

‘What a fool the fellow is!’ he remarked to Mr. Brereton; ‘to go to-day of all days—the worst gale we have had yet. I wonder the post went over. If he knew the Mediterranean as well as I do he wouldn’t risk his neck out on such a sea.’

‘He must be altogether short of common

sense, and more than that, to hazard his life for a mere piece of foolhardiness !' replied Mr. Brereton, whose friendliness towards the ex-officer seemed to abate in proportion as that of the ladies of his party augmented. His tone of detraction appeared to rouse a general disapprobation.

'A fellow shouldn't be a milk-sop either, you know,' remarked the artist.

'Oh, my dear,' said Mrs. Brereton, 'very probably he had some good reason for going over to-day.'

Mr. Brereton turned away irritably.

'All you women have gone mad upon the fellow,' he muttered ; 'in your opinion that sort of show-off courage is a fine thing, I suppose.'

'It might be show-off in us, but it is natural, I fancy, to some people,' observed his step-daughter.

Her tone was very quiet, but there was a momentary glow upon her face which did

not tend to improve Mr. Brereton's temper as he turned an angry look upon her and left the room.

Breakfast was no sooner over than Blanche Hopkins besought her friend to take a turn in the direction of the Marina.

'I don't want to see the boat come in,' said Nell; 'we are not so very anxious about Captain De Witt's safety.'

'Aren't we?' asked the little American. 'I guess I am, though, and I don't mind saying so. But we needn't wait for it to come in. We can just watch it in sight, that's all.' And her companion acquiesced, Waif following them silently, with none of his usual youthful bounds and curvetings.

When at length they found a sheltered nook not far from the landing stage, and sat down for a while, he squeezed himself in between them; for Waif was fond of ladies' society—nice ladies, that is to say. He seemed greatly gratified when Miss

Lingwood placed a hand upon his head and kept it there.

As a rule Miss Hopkins paid Waif the most attention, yet it was Nell Lingwood whom the dog plainly preferred. The truth was, Waif would have found it impossible to differ from his master in a matter of taste.

‘Nice dog,’ she said, caressing his sleek black head; ‘dear old dog.’ And Waif responded by gently laying a clean but sandy paw upon her shoulder, and looking affectionately into her face with his hazel eyes.

‘Almost as nice as his master, but not quite,’ said Blanche Hopkins slyly.

Nell’s face became for one moment rosy red; then she softly pushed down Waif’s paw, and answered coldly,

‘A great deal nicer than any master could be. Do you really imagine, Blanche, that it is necessary to fall in love with every agreeable man one meets?’

‘I don’t know, dear. I think *I* do, more or less.’

‘Ah! but they all fall in love with you first—really.’

‘And do you think that nobody falls in love with you—“really”? Are you so repellant?’

Nell drooped her head for a moment.

‘No one will ever care for me disinterestedly, I think,’ she said in a low voice.

‘Oh, my dear, how unjust you are! Do you think there are no real gentlemen—no noble-minded men in the world?’

‘I don’t know; there are many more of the other sort, I fancy.’

‘What a pity you’ve got such a lot of money!’ remarked Miss Hopkins, looking at her friend compassionately; ‘you would be much happier if you weren’t an heiress.’

‘I should be a free woman,’ said the other, as if in assent to her words.

And then silence fell between the two

girls, as they sat watching the long lines of dazzling foam, and listening to the roar of the breakers that dashed in upon the shore below them. Presently Nell Lingwood rose.

‘There is no sign of the boat, Blanche,’ she said; ‘we had better go on; it is often late, you know, when the weather is bad. Will it be late to-day, Guiseppe?’ she inquired of a young boatman whose acquaintance they had made, and who happened to be passing.

‘Si, signorina, it may not be in for an hour or two yet; perhaps they will wait at Sorrento till the wind abates.’

And the pair dawdled homewards, calling to Waif to follow them. But Waif had other intentions, and merely wagged his tail in reply as a parting salutation. There was no reason now why he should not take up his position on the shore, and await his master’s return. That day, the next, or

when? No matter; when he *did* come his dog would be the first to see him. It was all very well leaving the pier and returning to the house that morning when he was bidden. He had performed the duty of obedience without argument. But there had been no fiat against his return to the shore; and there he now meant to stay—a square, erect dog, with nose pointed seawards and keen eyes scanning the distant horizon.

Patience usually has its reward at last. And presently the bright eyes grew more fixed in their observation as a speck appeared in view, now rising above, now lost among the waves; and all Waif's body began to quiver with the eagerness of a hope which soon became certainty. His master was there! He shifted his position a few yards, and again sat himself down statue-like. But a few moments later there was a sudden sharp short yelp from the

dog ; and he had plunged headlong off the pier into the boiling surf, and was making his way out to sea with steady strokes of his strong young limbs. He had been the first to see the upsetting of the boat, and was the first to reach the floating men ; and when De Witt called to him to retire, and to abstain from lending assistance, he remained swimming about, round and round his master, in an agony of apprehension.

The submersion was a tolerably lengthy one, and the first boat was none too soon for one or two of the men, who were growing exhausted with the effort of holding on to a slippery surface whilst being knocked about so roughly by the angry sea. Barrington, however, was little the worse for his plunge ; his circulation was sufficiently good and his arms sufficiently athletic to make the situation less trying to him than to most men, whilst his nerves were proof to stand against a

tolerably severe test. He began to laugh as soon as he had scrambled into the boat after his companions—chiefly at the woe-begone appearance they all presented, and could not resist the enjoyment of a word of chaff.

‘Where is the Madonna’s box?’ he asked with mischief in his eye; ‘did she not even take the trouble to save that? What a pity you wasted your soldi.’

The Captain crossed himself.

‘Hush, Signor,’ he said, shivering with the cold of his long immersion, for the day was unusually chilly; ‘you should not joke on such a matter. Who knows but that we might all have been drowned just now if it had not been for the goodness of Our Lady del Succorso?’

CHAPTER V.

A WINDY WALK.

‘Precipitous cliffs, black and lowering—
Waves rolling hoarsely and high—
Foam streaks, like pale lips quivering,
Pressed towards a last good-bye.’—ANON.

DE WITT took care to creep indoors as unobtrusively as possible. He had no fancy to play the hero of a somewhat foolish prank, and was congratulating himself upon his luck in meeting no one, when, upon the top of the staircase, he came face to face with Blanche Hopkins and Mr. Wallace.

Miss Hopkins flew towards him impulsively.

‘We were coming to meet the rescued

crew!’ she exclaimed; ‘how quick you have come up. Oh, I am glad you are all right! But we shan’t soon forgive you the fright you gave us all, I guess. There! if you had managed to drown yourself—only fancy!’

‘There would have been one useless mortal the less in the world,’ he replied, unable to resist holding the small hand in his for a moment. ‘Should you have cared?’

‘Cared! I should think so! I should have felt like crying my eyes out.’

Then she burst into a fit of merry laughter.

‘Oh, my! what a guy you are! they forgot to wring you out after your washing. Mrs. Brereton—Nell—look here!’

But he hurriedly escaped, echoing her laugh, and followed by Wallace.

‘Well, you are a pretty fool!’ remarked the latter, but in so friendly a tone that his

words could not give offence. 'Did you want to commit suicide genteelly?'

'Why should the boat upset just because I was in it? Am I a Jonah?'

'I dare say the men think so.'

'I dare say they do; they were frightened enough, poor idiots, to think anything. I say, Wallace, as you are here, just make yourself useful, will you? and go at the bell till you bring up somebody to take away these wet things.'

'It's a mercy they weren't your grave-clothes.'

'Perhaps it is; though why we should capsize just then I can't imagine. It was fairly calm, and no gale to speak of. Just my luck, to play the fool like this.'

'You should have seen their faces in the salon when the news came that you were upset.'

'Why?' asked Barrington, with a shame-faced laugh. 'Did they go into hysterics?'

‘Mrs. Brereton nearly did. She shrieked aloud until that little sprat of a husband of hers scolded her into quiet.’

‘And the girls—they didn’t go into hysterics, I suppose?’

‘They were awfully upset. They both went as white—as white as that sheet, and one of them burst into tears.’

‘Which?’ asked Barrington, his head just emerging from the basin.

‘Miss Hopkins.’

Barrington plunged his head in once more before he spoke.

‘She is a dear little impulsive girl,’ he remarked then.

‘De Witt—do you think she cares a scrap for me? Don’t look so startled, man; haven’t you seen all along how it was with me? I’ve worshipped her, fairly worshipped her from the first hour I saw her. She’s the loveliest and the sweetest little creature that ever stepped upon this earth. But

there—it doesn't matter whether she cares for me or not. I mustn't say anything to her, I suppose. I suppose a man who's said to be in a consumption oughtn't to think of marrying, ought he?'

De Witt rubbed his face hard with the towel.

'How can I tell you, my dear fellow? It's rather a nice question, isn't it? Are you really so sure you are under sentence of death?'

'I don't know; sometimes I think I'm getting better. But I suppose I'm not. No, I don't believe I ought to ask any girl to marry me. But it's hard. I'm not penniless, and I'm getting on. And I *would* make that girl a good husband, if she'd have me. I dare say you think me a queer fellow, De Witt, for blurting all this out to you, a comparative stranger; but you have a way with you, and somehow I've had a liking for you from the

first. You are the first man that's come to Capri since I arrived here that I've taken to.'

'I wish I could help you; fate seems hard upon you.'

'Thanks; it is.' And the young artist rose and walked towards the window, a cloud upon his usually smooth brow.

He had almost recovered his usual light-heartedness, however, when the household assembled for lunch, and joined De Witt heartily in a proposal made by him for a long walk towards the lighthouse at the further end of the island.

'What's to be seen there?' asked Mr. Brereton, ungraciously.

'The surf, of course,' replied the artist. 'It will be a hundred or more feet high over those rocks.'

'We've got plenty of rocks close at hand, and surf too,' remarked Mr. Brereton; but nobody heeded him.

‘Mamma, will you come?’ asked Miss Lingwood.

‘Me, my dear!—how could I get all that way? All my bones are sore as it is with those horrible donkeys. Besides, I should be blown away in this wind.’

‘You must be mad, Eleanor, to propose such a thing to your mother,’ remarked her step-father with scant courtesy; and Blanche Hopkins laughed, and said in her pretty impudent way,—

‘Don’t be so cross, Mr. Brereton; we can take very good care of ourselves.’

But this Mr. Brereton would not permit, and he accordingly escorted the quartette for the first few miles, making himself generally disagreeable with his complaints about the steepness of the hill, the roughness of the roads, and the boisterous nature of the wind.

Blanche Hopkins, who with De Witt was walking a little behind the other three,

laughed again merrily, as stray portions of a growl came wafting back towards them on the wings of the breeze.

‘Poor Nell!’ she exclaimed compassionately. ‘I’m glad, anyhow, I have not got such a discontented little man tied about to my skirts wherever I go. Isn’t it just wonderful that Mrs. Brereton should ever have taken a fancy to him?’

‘Wonderful indeed!’ acquiesced De Witt.

‘And yet, you know,’ pursued the girl, who was of a very charitable disposition, ‘he’s not so bad—it’s only he’s so bothering. I believe he’s fond in his way of his wife.’

‘And his step-daughter?’ asked De Witt.

Miss Hopkins screwed up her rosy little mouth.

‘Ah, well, you see, that’s a different matter. Nell’s an important person because of her money, but I guess they don’t quite hit it off together.’

‘ Oh, Miss Lingwood’s an heiress, is she ? ’

‘ Well, we shouldn’t call it such great things in America, but they think more of a little money in England, and I suppose old Brereton would be just mad if she were to marry and take it off with her.’

‘ Perhaps Miss Lingwood may meet with some one who doesn’t care about her fortune.’

‘ I don’t see why she shouldn’t; she’s nice enough and pretty enough. But she doesn’t think she will.’

‘ Has she so bad an opinion of mankind in general ? ’ asked Barrington, thinking of the conversation he had overheard on the balcony.

‘ Well, you see, it’s a nasty thing in England for a girl to have a lot of money. There are so many adventurers and fortune-hunters always pestering her, that it’s no wonder if she begins to think everybody’s the same. I don’t. I’ve plenty of my own

too ; but, goodness me ! I can always tell you what a man's like the moment I set eyes on him.'

'I hope you judge me favourably—and Wallace ?'

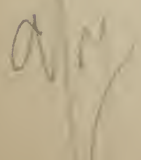
'Well, now, if I didn't, do you think I would talk to you like this ?'

'Thank you, Miss Hopkins. I don't think anything you say to me will be abused.' And De Witt looked at his companion with a sense of cordiality.

'There !' she exclaimed, 'I told you Mr. Brereton would not trouble us long. He's turning back now ; he don't like the wind. Well, there's one thing we've got to thank this wind for, and that is, that Robert Lingwood won't come over so long as it lasts. He's an awful sailor.'

'Who on earth is Robert Lingwood ?' inquired her companion.

'The son. Ah, his father's not a patch upon him ! He is real horrid. He's the



only man I ever saw in my life that I couldn't find a single thing to like in.'

Barrington laughed at this declaration of so catholic a regard for humanity.

'I guess he's in an awful rage now with us and the weather, kicking his heels at Sorrento,' she continued. 'Well, Mr. Brereton, so you are going home again?'

'Yes; I have had enough of it. It's not a fit day for man or beast. And what there can be in a lump of spray to go scrambling for miles over this abominable country passes me. But of course, if you like it, you must go on.'

Mr. Brereton's desertion caused a little change in the arrangement of the quartette. The two in front waited for the others, and for some few paces they all walked on abreast; then the narrowness of the path again separated them, and, somehow or other, Barrington found himself beside Miss Lingwood, whilst Wallace

marched on more quickly with the young American.

A lovely colour flushed her cheeks, she was more gay and sparkling even than usual; and the poor artist, as he walked beside her on the little path, sometimes holding her hand for a moment in his to assist her over the rough places, felt his head completely gone, and more madly in love than ever. His good resolutions went to the winds, and he became more and more sentimental as at length they sat down to rest in a nook close beneath the rearing rocks.

‘Oh!’ said Blanche, shuddering as she gazed down into the boiling sea, and then shut her eyes, ‘I can’t bear to look into it, when I think how nearly Captain De Witt was drowned this morning!’

‘You were very much terrified about that, Miss Hopkins?’

‘Well, I should just say I was!’

‘Would you have been as sorry if it had been me?’ he asked, with a lover’s jealousy. ‘Would you mind if such a thing happened to me as to be drowned or killed in any way?’

‘Mind? Why, I guess I should just go wild about it.’

‘Would you really? Do you really like me?’

‘Why, of course I do,’ and she turned her bright eyes full upon him. ‘We’ve all had real nice times together on this little island here, haven’t we?’

‘Too nice for me,’ groaned poor Wallace. ‘I sha’n’t get over it for years when you go away—perhaps never.’

‘Oh, yes, you will,’ she said genially; ‘it isn’t so bad as that.’

‘It couldn’t be worse,’ he exclaimed, desperately. ‘I never cared for any one before—and now—I could just lie down and die for you—for you, Blanche. And

I suppose I oughtn't to say it, only that I know you don't care one scrap for me.'

'Oh, yes, I do though—I like you awfully.'

'But not in that way! You wouldn't marry me?'

'No, not in that way,' she replied slowly. 'But in any other way. Won't any other way do, Mr. Wallace? Mayn't we be just dear friends?'

'I'll be thankful to be anything you will let me,' said the young artist. 'I may as well go off the hooks as not,' he continued despondently. 'I never can get anything I wish. I don't care if I do die of consumption now.'

'Oh, Mr. Wallace! get nothing? Why, you, so good, and kind, and clever, and so good-looking, you will get most things in life you want—from the ladies, at any rate. And with your talent, why, you will soon get to the top of the tree; and

how proud I shall be to have a friend a Royal Academician.'

'Don't try to comfort me—it's no use,' said Wallace.

'Well, then, Mr. Wallace, I'll tell you a secret—a secret nobody knows but my friend Nell, not even Mrs. Brereton. But I know I can trust you. I was engaged to be married before ever I left America; or perhaps—it's most likely, you know—I might have taken a fancy to you.' And she blushed, and smiled into his face. 'No one knows of it, Mr. Wallace. We're waiting because my people think he's too poor, and he don't feel himself like marrying on my money; but he's getting on pretty well now. So say you'll forgive me, won't you?'

Wallace had turned towards her, interested half against his will as she began her little confidence; and now he took the hand she held out towards him, and raised it to his lips.

‘I may do this, mayn’t I, Blanche? And call you by your own pretty name just once?’

‘You might always call me Blanche if you liked, only I’m afraid Mrs. Brereton mightn’t think it proper.’

‘If I’d known this before, Blanche— And yet, I don’t believe knowing anything would have prevented my caring for you. It took hold of me the first evening I saw you.’

And he continued to talk gently, sadly of his own trouble, and of his wasted love, without anything on the girl’s part making him feel as if she were not the most natural recipient of his confidences. Miss Hopkins, in fact, was so tender, so sympathetic, that her manner unconsciously soothed him, and helped to heal the wound she had inflicted, whilst binding the artist to her more strongly than ever. She was so gentle and so flattering, that by degrees she restored his troubled self-respect, and even his equanimity, and

seemed quite to act the part of a mother consoling a sorrowful child.

Meanwhile De Witt and his companion had struggled on to the very verge of the steepest cliffs, where for some time they crouched upon the overhanging rocks, unable to hear each other's voices amid the wild tumult of the thundering waves, and wetted by the sheets of foam that rose up from beneath their feet, a hundred feet below.

It was long before Nell Lingwood could tear herself away; she seemed to find a fascination in the wild chaos of the waters and the impassive strength of the resisting walls; and even when they had retired a little way, and were walking slowly up the path again together, she was silent for several minutes, as if still under the spell of that terrible grandeur.

Then she turned towards De Witt, speaking abruptly :

‘It wasn’t like that where you were this morning?’

‘Why, no. If it had been, there would not have been a bit of us left as big as a sixpenny-piece.’

‘What did you feel like when you found yourself in the water?’

‘Well, I felt very foolish.’

‘Not frightened?’

‘Not particularly; why should I? I knew we should all be able probably to hold on till a boat came.’

‘Have you never been frightened in your life?’

‘Rather. I was mortally frightened once when a mad dog got into the barrack-yard and raced me round it; and I remember nearly dying of fright once when a fish-bone stuck in my throat, and couldn’t be got to go up or down.’

‘What a wonderful thing nerve is,’ said his companion musingly; ‘I wish I had it.’

‘I dare say you have as much as I. Women, at any rate, have an awful lot of moral courage. They don’t care for public opinion a tithe what men do.’

‘No, I don’t think they do. But then that is because they have more depth of feeling.’

‘Have men so little feeling?’ he asked with a smile. ‘You are hard upon us, Miss Lingwood.’

Her cheek flushed.

‘One must not generalize, I suppose.’

‘Men are not all alike surely, any more than women,’ he observed. ‘I fear you are a severe critic.’

‘I am afraid I am,’ she replied with sudden humility; ‘and it is so horrid for a woman to be suspicious and uncharitable, is it not? But I have been unlucky, I think.’ And the sadness of her tone touched De Witt.

‘It is better to think too well than too ill of people, is it not?’ he asked. ‘For my

part, I would rather find myself taken in sometimes than risk the loss of a possible friend.'

'You are quite right,' she said. 'I am always telling myself so. But then circumstances—'

And she stopped, crimsoning suddenly.

He did not press her to finish her sentence; he was too much struck by the new phase in her character. He had not thought it in her to put aside her reserve so completely.

'Don't you think, Captain De Witt,' she continued presently in the same tone, 'it requires a large mind not to judge all the world by our own little surroundings?'

'Well, I suppose so. I suppose the mole thinks all creation must be blind, and the chrysalis doesn't guess there is anything outside its skin.'

'When I am inclined to be narrow,' she remarked laughing, yet half serious, 'I

will think of the mole and the chrysalis. Thank you, Captain De Witt. I think, if I could change identities, I would become Blanche Hopkins. She has such a sweet nature. She likes almost everybody, and can put up with people who drive me wild.'

'But a person who doesn't like everybody may perhaps like a few the more strongly?' And he looked towards her interrogatively.

'I don't know about that. If you mean me, I think I am not much given to making friends. Blanche there is about the nearest approach I ever made to a friendship, and I am only one of a dozen with her.'

'Male or female?' asked Barrington, his eyes wandering to where the young lady referred to stood outlined before them on a little eminence not far off, her animated face turned towards her companion.

Miss Lingwood laughed softly as her gaze followed his.

‘Both,’ she replied. ‘That is going to be another sample of Blanche’s peculiar talent, I am afraid.’

‘The talent of transmuting lovers into friends?’ he asked.

‘Exactly.’

‘It is a rare one,’ he remarked, ‘but must no doubt be very useful to so pretty and attractive a girl. But is it not rather a fragile form of friendship when achieved?’

‘I should have thought so. But then I don’t believe in men and women friendships, even where people are supposed not to be in love.’

‘I am sorry,’ he said gravely. ‘Do you make no exceptions to your rule?’

‘Oh, no doubt there may be exceptions.’

‘Because I had hoped that we might call ourselves something like friends already.’

Nell Lingwood paused, and glanced for a moment quickly towards him; then her

eyes met his with a sudden frankness that lit up her face with sunshine.

‘Perhaps we are,’ she replied. ‘I don’t wish to be bigoted. I am quite willing to try it.’

‘Then,’ he said brightly, ‘let us sign the covenant, and write down the friendship mutual from this moment.’

‘But there must be two conditions, Captain De Witt.’

‘Which are?’

‘Well, first, that friends only speak the truth, the entire truth, to each other; and secondly, that they never flatter or pay each other compliments.’

‘But in keeping the first condition I am afraid I may sometimes be—unjustly—considered guilty of breaking the second.’

A slight cloud rested upon her brow.

‘You are doing it first thing. Is not that speech meant for a compliment?’

‘It is not *meant* for one.’

‘If you knew how I hated flattery, how I loathe the very suspicion of a compliment!’ she exclaimed impatiently.

‘Indeed,’ he said seriously and humbly, ‘I will try my very best not to be disagreeably civil—I will be as rude as ever I can.’

‘Now you are making fun of me. But we can never be friends if you do not understand the sort of physical repulsion what people call “pretty speeches” give me. I can’t explain it, but I am very much in earnest.’

‘I am sure you are; and so am I. And as I don’t want you to dislike me, I shall remember the warning.’

‘Thank you,’ she said, with a sort of childlike simplicity.

She was still very young at heart, he felt, notwithstanding her implied knowledge of the world, and suspicion of men and manners. The girl seemed full of

contradictions; her character and her very words and thoughts seemed to have so many different inflections, to run in so many different grooves, according to the vein of feeling that momentarily possessed her, that she appeared to him like a different person at different times. She seemed to have acquired a habit of self-repression foreign to her natural disposition, and to be constantly checking a strong and demonstrative individuality. Since he had taken to studying her, the fancy gained possession of his mind that she somehow typified a beautiful and expansive organism, cramped into half development by the outside shell of unfavourable circumstances. It was a fanciful idea, but one that grew upon him more and more as he became better acquainted, and which certainly did not lessen his interest in his companion.

‘All the more,’ he added, watching her from beneath half-closed eyelids, ‘because

I am sure that if you disliked any one, it would not be by halves.'

She gave a little humiliated sigh.

'Have you found out already how vindictive I am? But I think there is only one person in the world I really dislike. And,' she continued, her face flushing, 'he is mean, and prying, and small-minded. Don't you think it is an instinct—almost a right one—to dislike low, mean people?'

'In the same way one dislikes all creeping beasts? Well, as you say, it is, at any rate, a natural instinct, and probably a healthy one.'

'Of course I know,' she said thoughtfully, 'one ought to try to dislike the qualities, but tolerate the person. But it is very difficult to draw that distinction in practise, is it not?'

'Very,' replied Barrington, smiling a little.

She seemed now to have completely taken him at his word, and to have thrown

off the armour of self-defence; and with her evidently sincere promise of friendship, she showed herself to him with a frank ingenuousness that touched him, and proved to him that his theory of the cramped organism was beyond doubt correct.

‘I wonder,’ he continued, ‘if it is not too curious a question—what he has done to deserve your dislike?’

‘It is not anything particular that he has done. Don’t you see? It is not so much what people do as what they *are* that makes one like or dislike them. One could forgive a great injury perhaps, but one can never learn to like a person one despises. Perhaps you may see the one I am thinking of some day, and then, I think, you will feel it too.’

It was not unpleasant, Barrington felt, to be classed by a pretty girl as likely to be in sympathy with her on the score of a sensation of contempt for inferior people;

and it suddenly flashed across him as an inspiration who was the particular human reptile referred to. It must be the Robert Brereton named by Blanche Hopkins—the one man in whom that charitable little coquette could see no redeeming trait—Miss Lingwood's step-brother. Truly, De Witt began to feel almost curious to behold this unfavourable specimen of humanity, and knew not which most to pity—Nell Lingwood, for the burden of such a connection, or the young man himself, for his overweening unpopularity with two such charming girls. He was too discreet, however, to put forward his discovery, and their talk presently drifted into other channels.

So interested were they both, and so pleasant a shelter was the little nook which Barrington had found, that it was not until a bar of crimson began to stretch itself across the golden sky, catching the girl's

eye, that she bethought herself of the hour, and started from her seat.

‘Captain De Witt! Is it really sunset time?’

‘The sun has not set yet. It is not much after seven o’clock,’ he replied.

‘We shall be late for dinner.’ And she began to hurry forwards.

‘What then?’ he demanded coolly. ‘We shall be a snug little *partie carrée*—much better.’

‘Where are Blanche and Mr. Wallace? I don’t see them anywhere.’

‘Probably mooning about somewhere near.’

‘Oh, no, they are not; they are gone home. They might have given us a call.’

‘Perhaps they thought we were old enough and wise enough to take care of ourselves.’

‘I wish you would come on, Captain De Witt; you are so dreadfully cool about everything.’

‘Why should I pretend to be sorry when I’m not? Why didn’t I put you with your back to the sunset?’

‘Then it is unkind of you,’ she said, half-petulantly, ‘when you knew I should like to have been home for dinner.’

‘Am I not always to speak the truth?’ he asked.

Her only reply was to hurry on even faster, with a slight gesture of irritation.

‘Take care, Miss Lingwood. Let me give you a hand. That stone is loose.’

But she had already put her foot upon the stone in question, and begun to mount the low, half-broken wall, over which he had vaulted, and was now turning to offer her his assistance.

His hand was not taken, however; the stone turned, and she would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms. She gave a momentary struggle, as if to release herself; then the laugh died away upon

her lips, and with a sudden cry he felt her full weight hanging upon him.

‘Let me sit down,’ she exclaimed, faintly ; and he placed her gently upon the ground.

Her face was deadly white, and her eyes closed for a minute. After a few moments, however, they reopened, whilst he was bending over her in his man’s distracted horror of a fainting fit ; and she endeavoured to smile.

‘I’m all right,’ she said, trying to raise herself into a sitting posture ; ‘don’t look so frightened !’

‘Pray lie still a minute longer ; you are so white.’

‘I *feel* white,’ she said, laughing feebly.

‘Where did you hurt yourself ?’

‘It was my foot—that horrid stone. I’m afraid I’ve sprained it.’

‘Well, you had better not try to walk for a few minutes.’

She moved her foot, touched it, and then looked up ruefully.

‘I don’t believe I can walk at all. Oh, what *shall* I do?’

Barrington laughed with the spontaneous audacity that comes natural to some men, and is so rarely taken amiss by the fair sex.

‘Why, if it comes to that, I would carry you to Anacapri for sixpence! You are light enough.’

‘Oh, it is too serious for a joke!’

‘But, if you insist upon having a four-footed beast of burden in preference, we can soon get a donkey from the village.’

‘You will have to go and fetch it. Oh, I’m so sorry to give all this trouble!’

‘Perhaps I shall see the others, and they can send us back one.’

He ran down the pathway, shouting vigorously. But only the echoes responded to his cry of, ‘Wallace! I say, Wallace!’ and he was pausing in deliberation, unwilling to leave her alone whilst he returned

to the village, and yet perceiving the necessity of something being done at once, when his face suddenly brightened at the sight of a ragged young peasant plodding towards him from the direction of the lighthouse. Here was the very thing ! And in a couple of minutes he had joined the man, and in his easily-flowing, ungrammatical Italian had explained his errand, and sent the *contadino* off post-haste, with the promise of a liberal reward. Then he returned to his companion, reporting his success, and helping her to drag herself into a more comfortable position against the little sheltering wall. But her replies to his remarks grew briefer and briefer, and presently, after a pause, she suddenly exclaimed :

‘I can’t bear it any longer !’

‘Are you going to faint again ?’ he asked in real terror, for she was almost whiter than at first ; and at the words she laughed hysterically.

‘No; but my boot—it hurts me so terribly. I can’t get it off. I tried while you were talking to that man, but my foot is so swelled—’

‘Why *didn’t* you tell me before?’ he asked, as he fished a clasp-knife out of his pocket. ‘Why, I could have relieved you in a minute.’ And he began hastily cutting the buttons off, one by one.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘I ought to have known that a man always has a knife in his pocket.’ And as he proceeded to pull off the boot as gently as possible, she set her lips firmly together, and suppressed a cry.

‘It hurt,’ he said, looking up at her and keeping her foot for one moment in his hand; ‘poor little foot!’ And he laid it down tenderly as he put the boot in his pocket.

Nell made no reply. Probably she realized that pity, and, under the circumstances, even something not unlike a caress,

was admissible between friends. Relieved from the strain of the boot, she declared the pain to be nothing, and became quite cheerful.

To De Witt the period of waiting was certainly no unpleasant time. To sit out on a lonely hill-side, surrounded by wild rocks, a foaming sea, and a many-coloured sky, during that soft pause of comparative stillness that so often accompanies the dying out of a stormy day—so to sit with a pleasant companion, a beautiful girl, beside him, was certainly no uncongenial method of spending half-an-hour. The wind had dropped rapidly the last hour, and it was now almost calm.

Nell Lingwood, perhaps still in a little pain or weakened by her fainting, sat leaning back more silent than before, but smiling and interested as he talked to her, her pale face looking very sweet in the fading daylight. It seemed to De Witt,

whether true or not, that a new and unwonted touch of softness pervaded the atmosphere between them; and he spoke to her of things he had never named before—of personal thoughts and hopes, of the little disappointments and trivialities that make up the main sum of our lives, and yet which, as a rule, we keep to ourselves, unless some such moment and companion tempt us to break loose from an intuitive reticence, by that insidious charm of wordless interest, of silent sympathy.

When at length steps were heard upon the stony path, and his messenger was seen returning, followed by a donkey and a donkey woman, it seemed to him as if the man had fulfilled his errand almost too quickly. He sprang up, however, and saw that the sun had now really set, and that it was as well for Nell Lingwood's wounded foot that they had not been longer belated on this rough uneven way.

She rose with the assistance of his hand.

‘If you will give me your arm, I can get over the wall,’ she said.

‘How?’ he asked incredulously. ‘How will you climb with one foot?’

‘I can hop,’ she replied, laughing.

He did not attempt to offer his arm. ‘Even you cannot do the impossible,’ he said gravely. ‘I shall carry you.’

And lifting her in his arms, he picked his way carefully over the fallen stones, and placed her upon the saddle. As he did so he glanced for a moment into her face. She was not angry as she gave him a quiet ‘Thank you.’ Was there even a softer look upon the beautiful features, or was it only the effect of the little rosy flush that had risen to her cheeks?

He was silent for a few moments. He had made a discovery. He loved this girl. Perhaps he had already been in love with her for some days—since he first saw her.

It was possible. But it was whilst holding her in his arms that the conviction broke upon him so surely, so suddenly. It was only for a few seconds; but he acknowledged the fact, and it gave him food for reflection.

‘Signor,’ said the peasant, edging up to him on the narrow pathway, ‘I met another lady and gentleman not far from the village. And the lady was so tired, she wanted us to let her have the donkey to ride back to Capri; but I told her we could not, because it was for your Signora, who had hurt her foot. So then they said they were of the same party, and if they had not been so tired, they should have come back to help you. They lamented greatly that the Signora should have hurt herself.’

This diverted Barrington’s thoughts, and he laughingly translated the account to his companion.

‘Poor Blanche!’ she exclaimed. ‘I don’t wonder she is tired; I don’t suppose she has ever walked so far as this in her life before. I feel mean to have deprived her of perhaps the one donkey of Anacapri.’

‘Here they are!’ exclaimed De Witt a few moments later, as they turned the corner into the village.

The pair were, in fact, seated upon the grass by the roadside; before them a second donkey, with a side-saddle and an attendant boy.

‘So you have managed to find another beast for Miss Hopkins, I see,’ remarked De Witt, as the others rose quickly, perceiving them.

‘Yes, we were lucky enough to meet with it,’ replied the young artist. ‘I don’t know how we could have got on without, for Miss Hopkins is quite done up. But we couldn’t make up our minds to go on without you, we were both so anxious

about Miss Lingwood; so we thought we would wait here till you came up.'

'And all go home in disgrace together,' added the little American. 'Oh, Nell dear, *how* are you? Is your foot bad?'

'I shall get over it,' laughed the other, lightly; whilst Barrington smiled to himself at Wallace's ingenious remark.

His anxiety had been a decent excuse for persuading Miss Hopkins into lengthening a pleasant *tête-à-tête* walk by yet another half-hour. He was amused, but not sardonic. Who was he to laugh at any man for being transparently, foolishly in love? The turn of each must come. Poor fellow! it was a pity Wallace had set his heart upon a girl who, according to her friend, was not likely to accept the gift at its full value.

It was almost if not quite dark when at length the little procession paused at the entrance to the hotel, and the two

men proceeded to help the girls off their respective beasts. Nell's foot was quite stiff, and she hobbled with difficulty down the passage.

‘My word!’ whispered Blanche in a confiding aside to her companions, ‘shan’t we all catch it now? Won’t there be just a chorus of “I told you so’s” when *she* comes limping in!’

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNPOPULAR MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

‘Self-love is not so vile a sin as self-forgetting.’

SHAKESPEARE.

THE breakfast-room was empty the next morning when De Witt entered, and he finished his meal in solitude. The day was bright and fine, and Wallace no doubt was off to his studio; whilst the ladies of the Brereton party were, he supposed, too tired to put in an appearance. He lingered about some little time in hope of an opportunity to inquire after Miss Lingwood’s sprained foot, and then went for a desultory stroll with Waif.

When he returned it was nearly lunch-time, and most of the party were assembled

in the little salon. Nell herself, however was not there, he saw at a glance; and he moved towards her mother to make his inquiries.

Mrs. Brereton's kindly face wore a rather worried expression, and De Witt felt sure her husband had been nagging at her.

'I'm afraid it's rather bad, thank you, Captain De Witt,' she replied,—'a somewhat severe sprain; I don't think she will be able to put her foot down for some days.'

'Days!' echoed her husband snappishly; 'she will be lucky if she can walk in a week! And just when the bad weather has broken up, and we might have got away from the place.'

'Well, you know, Edward,' remarked his wife, soothingly, 'we must have stayed a couple of days longer for Robert to see the island.'

'A couple of days! Don't I tell you the girl will be on the sofa for a week at least?'

‘It is very unfortunate,’ said De Witt, reflecting, as he spoke, upon the insincerity of his words. ‘One never knows when a mishap of that sort may not happen.’

‘I told you all yesterday you were on a fool’s errand,’ remarked the elder man with irritation. ‘I knew some harm would come of it. Through that storm, and such an unfit distance! I told the girls; but nobody ever listens to me.’

‘Oh, yes, they do, dear,’ said Mrs. Brereton; ‘but young people will be young people. And it might just as well have happened any other day, you know.’

Probably she thought De Witt had borne his scolding well, for she smiled in a friendly manner towards him, and then called to a young man who stood near with his hands in his pockets, gazing out of the window.

‘Robert, come here. I want to introduce you to our friend, Captain De Witt. My stepson, Mr. Brereton.’

The young man turned round and gave first a sharp, scrutinizing glance, and then a stiff nod to the other. He was of a short, slight figure, and of sandy hair and complexion, and his prevailing characteristic might be said to be insignificance. His eyes were his most salient point, for, small and set closely together, they had a certain air of penetration about them that was more than half cunning; and when you looked closely into them, they too were yellow, or as nearly that colour as human eyes may be. He was dressed in a light yellow suit, and gave Barrington altogether the impression of a short piece of tow-rope stuck up on end.

So this was Nell's step-brother—the object of her uncontrollable dislike. Well, it was quite possible that a more intimate acquaintance with Mr. Robert Brereton might cement a sympathy between them on that point as well as others. He was not

charmed at first sight with his companion, but he gave him a good-humoured nod and word of greeting; for it was not De Witt's nature to be unfriendly without due cause to any one.

But then he stood looking down upon the little yellow man for a moment engrossed in two reflections—the first a silent pity for Nell afflicted with the burden of such a connection, the second a silent wonder how any man under thirty could have had time to acquire so disagreeable an expression of countenance.

‘He *is* an unmitigated little cad, poor little chap!’ he thought to himself; asking aloud, ‘I suppose you had a first-rate crossing this morning?’

‘Well, I don’t know about first-rate,’ replied the other; ‘we had plenty of tossing. This Mediterranean is a beastly sea enough, it seems to me.’

He subsided into silence, and began to

gaze out of the window again; and De Witt, feeling that he had done his duty by the new-comer, strolled off to meet Blanche Hopkins, who had just entered.

‘Tired? I should just think I was!’ she exclaimed, in response to his queries. ‘But I’d do it all over again for the sake of those rocks. And so would Nell, she says—sprained foot and all. What do I think of Nell’s foot? Well, I guess she’ll be dancing around again in a few days. But my! what a fuss that old man does make over it! And so,’ she whispered, ‘the paragon’s come at last! Isn’t he a beauty? Have you spoken to him? Now he’s here there’ll be an end of all our fun. He goes poking around just like a ferret, does Robert. I guess Nell’s foot doesn’t matter now, for we shouldn’t have got any more nice walks.’

‘Miss Lingwood is not coming to lunch?’ inquired Barrington.

‘No, I guess she won’t try to come up and down-stairs for a day or two. After lunch? Well, I don’t know; I don’t see why she shouldn’t—this room’s on the same floor.’

Luncheon seemed to De Witt an unusually long and dreary affair that day. Nell’s absence seemed to make an unaccountable blank, and it was poor comfort to find her step-brother installed in her customary place beside himself. Mr. Robert Brereton was not communicative; probably at no time was he remarkable for powers of conversation; and after the exchange of one or two commonplaces, De Witt and he made no further effort towards sociability.

Immediately after luncheon Mr. and Mrs. Brereton started for a drive to Anacapri, but their son did not accompany them; and glancing into the salon a few minutes later, De Witt perceived him seated there with a newspaper in his hand. This completely

put to flight his own half-formed intention of finishing his novel in the one easy-chair afforded by that apartment; and whistling to Waif, he lit his cigar, and dawdled out towards the Punta Tragara; after a while leaving the little platform that commands so heavenly a view, and clambering downwards nearer to the purple sea, with its malachite bays and rings of silver foam; watching the restless sea birds, and flinging pebbles against the hollowed rocks. Presently, however, Waif pricked his ears and gave a low growl, the faintest of growls, for which he instantly apologized by lowering his head and lying down with an air of meaning nothing at all, and having made a trifling mistake in manners. Glancing upwards, Barrington saw a slight figure on the little path above him—a figure in a yellow suit, with eyeglass fixed into his short-sighted eyes. The figure stood still for several seconds, scanning the view;

then went forward upon the rocky pathway, not perceiving De Witt and his companion. And after a few moments the latter rose, and followed by his dog, reascended the hill and sauntered slowly homewards.

He had scarcely seated himself, novel in hand, and Waif at his feet, in front of the open window of the now deserted salon, when the door softly opened, and a pretty face full of mystery peered in, and gave a glance around.

‘That’s all right,’ she remarked, *sotto voce*; ‘he seems out of the way!’

‘Yes,’ said Barrington, ‘he’s safe enough for some time; he’s gone towards the Fariglicioni rocks.’

Blanche Hopkins laughed gleefully.

‘Ain’t you a smart young man?’ she asked. ‘Well, now that the coast’s clear—for I don’t count you—’

‘Of course not,’ said Barrington, ‘I never count.’

‘I shall go and fetch in Nell. What do you say to that?’

‘I say, by all means!’ he replied, jumping up with alacrity.

‘What’s the good of moping in a bedroom all day?’ continued the young lady. ‘I believe that old woodchuck wants to punish her for her walk yesterday. She’s not sick, you know.’

De Witt laughed aloud.

‘That old what? Oh, Miss Hopkins, what an invaluable vocabulary is yours!’

‘Well, I’m pretty smart, I guess, when it comes to abusing any one!’ she remarked, placidly. ‘Now, Captain De Witt, you get the couch ready; and when you hear me open that door, come and give her your arm, and we’ll get her in between us.’

In another minute or two the doorway indicated—which was that of Miss Lingwood’s room—opened, and Nell appeared, framed within it, laughing softly as she

hung on to her little friend's frail support. It was an easier matter when De Witt's firm arm had been substituted; and in a few moments more she had limped into the salon, and was comfortably established upon the sofa.

The girl's face was still a little pale, and she acknowledged to a bad night; but when De Witt began some self-reproachings on the score of her injured foot, she declared that it had not hurt her—much.

'By the bye,' she remarked, 'I think you have my boot still, Captain De Witt. I am sorry you should have had to carry it all the way home.'

Somehow Barrington had forgotten to return the boot.

'It *was* a great weight,' he said gravely; 'so very large.'

And Blanche laughed.

'Here are the buttons,' he added, bringing them one by one out of his waistcoat pocket.

‘What a careful young man!’ exclaimed Blanche. ‘Quite an old bachelor,’ she added, looking in his face to see if he appreciated the joke.

‘This is much pleasanter than the bedroom,’ remarked Nell, as her friend drew a low chair near the couch, and leant her head against it; whilst Waif laid an apologetic lick upon a slender hand which she stretched out towards him.

‘Isn’t it?’ asked Blanche. ‘If only no one else will come in—no one else, unless it’s Mr. Wallace. We don’t mind Mr. Wallace, do we?’

‘Not in the least. Some of us rather like him,’ said Barrington, who had established himself comfortably in a chair upon the other side.

Nell seemed in a silent mood; but there was no want of friendliness about her silence.

‘Suppose you read aloud to us, Captain

De Witt?' remarked Miss Hopkins. 'I feel sure you're a first-rate reader.'

'Should you like it?' he asked, turning towards the invalid; and meeting her eyes for the first time that morning, with something of an effort.

'There is nothing I love more,' she replied.

This settled the matter, and he rose.

'What shall it be?' he inquired. 'Poetry or prose?'

'Whichever you like; poetry, if you have any with you.'

He went to his room, returning with a small volume in his hand.

'I don't fancy you will know this man's name,' he observed. 'He is a new man, but I think he has a touch of the real fire in him.'

The two girls appeared to think so too, as, re-seating himself, he proceeded to read aloud in a quiet rich voice, that expressed a

perfect understanding with and sympathy for his author.

Both of them begged for another when the first—a long poem, a sort of parable of life—was ended.

‘I am glad you like him,’ said De Witt simply (unconscious how much of his hearers’ appreciation was due to his own effective rendering). ‘Here is another, shorter but more sentimental. You must excuse that—a poet to live must be sentimental—and metaphysical.’

‘I like it,’ said the American girl.

In the middle of this poem Wallace came in, but the reader did not pause; and with a bright smile of general greeting, the young artist dropped into a seat and joined the little circle.

A hot discussion arose when at length De Witt closed his book.

‘The fellow doesn’t know anything about true love,’ exclaimed Wallace boldly; ‘he

seems to think it possible to love two people at the same time.'

'Isn't that possible—to some natures?'

asked De Witt, to draw him out.

'Of course not. A feeble creature who can do that isn't worthy of the name of man—or woman!'

'Yet a good many of Anthony Trollope's heroes are guilty of it.'

'Hang Anthony Trollope's heroes! So they are, weak, washy sort of specimens—many of them. You agree with me, don't you, Miss Hopkins?' he asked eagerly.

'Well, I was just trying to make up my mind. I knew a case of a young man at home who did like that. He lived in Chicago; and he had been a long time acquainted with a young lady there, and felt like being in love with her. But one day he went up to Louisville on a visit, and there he met a beautiful girl, who just turned his head, and he made her an offer

the same week. Well, when he got home, he met his old flame again, and she seemed to think it was all settled between them, and it made him feel bad, particularly when he thought over how nice she was, and how many years he'd been real fond of her. He began to think he'd made a mistake about the other girl and been a fool, and that after all he didn't really care about her as much as he had fancied. So, as he was an honourable young man, he just took the train and went off to Louisville to tell her so, and to eat humble pie. But when he got there, he found she was so much lovelier than he expected, that he felt more in love with her than ever, and couldn't manage to say it. So he went back engaged to her; and he didn't like it at all, for as soon as ever he returned there was the old one smiling around and quite unconscious, and getting her former influence over him again. It wasn't only that he felt like being a sneak;

but he was real miserable, not knowing which he loved the best.'

'How did it end?' asked De Witt, enjoying the artist's protestive countenance of disgust.

'Well, it got settled for him at last this way. The Louisville girl's brother heard of the young lady in Chicago, and called upon him to ask what he meant. So the young man said he only wished he could tell him what he meant; for that he couldn't make up his own mind. Then the brother went at him like a tiger, called him a low sneak, and wanted to knock him down, and they had a fight. And that settled the matter; for of course my friend couldn't marry the girl whose brother had fought him.'

'I don't believe he was any friend of yours,' exclaimed Wallace hotly; 'and any way, he was a poor pitiful cur, that deserved his licking!'

'Well, he's married the other one now,'

she said complacently ; ‘and they get on very well together.’

‘I don’t envy her her husband,’ remarked Wallace.

‘If people knew everything about each other,’ said Nell Lingwood vaguely, ‘perhaps very few of them would marry.’

‘That sounds a pessimist remark, Miss Lingwood,’ said Barrington ; whilst the artist broke out in his vigorous, out-spoken way.

‘I don’t believe a word of it !’ he said. ‘There are plenty of honest men and women in the world, whatever poets and preachers may think.’

‘I agree with you, Mr. Wallace,’ said Blanche Hopkins, with her frank, bright smile ; ‘everybody isn’t so bad as they say, by any means. Look at us four now—ain’t we good sort of people ? There’s not one of us would do a dirty trick, would we ?’

‘Not one of us,’ echoed Wallace firmly ; whilst De Witt and Miss Lingwood both burst out laughing.

The artist’s composure was more than restored.

‘How jolly it is here !’ he exclaimed. ‘Isn’t it a snug little party ? It’s almost as good as another walk.’

He had scarcely finished speaking when the door opened slowly, and a face looked in, probably attracted by the peal of merry laughter. If that were the case, however, it was devoid of sympathy for the laughers. On the contrary, Mr. Robert Lingwood’s short-sighted eyes peered round with a disgusted scrutiny that was not flattering to the quartette beneath his inspection.

Having satisfied himself as to their individuality, he proceeded to follow his face into the room ; and a pause immediately ensued in the conversation.

‘You seem very merry here,’ he remarked

shortly, seeing that no one else offered up an observation.

‘We *were* very merry,’ said Blanche recklessly, careless of the accentuated word.

‘I thought,’ he observed, after another pause, turning towards his step-sister, his temper apparently not improved by the fair American’s innuendo, ‘that you were going to keep your room to-day?’

‘Did you?’ she said with indifference.

And Wallace, as he rose and passed De Witt’s chair, could not resist his almost inaudible comment—‘Score No. 2!’

Barrington rose also, perhaps to hide a smile, though in fact he felt angry enough with the fellow for coming in to disturb so sociable a party as theirs had been. He was beginning already, this first day, to experience a growing dislike of young Brereton, quite unusual to his easy-going nature; and as he strolled out of the room, accepting Wallace’s invitation to take a turn

outside, he nodded assent to the other's unvarnished criticism—'Pestering little brute!'

Meanwhile the brute in question was standing before the salon window, giving his opinion upon men and matters to his step-sister. Somehow, in the three or four minutes that had elapsed since he entered, the room had cleared itself; even Blanche Hopkins had deserted her friend, and there was no obstacle in the way of the young man offering a little unpalatable advice.

'Who's that fellow?' he asked grimly, as Wallace and De Witt filed out together.

'The last? That's a young artist, Mr. Wallace.'

'No, I don't mean him. I mean the big, dandy fellow, who thinks so much of himself.'

'I thought you had been introduced to him? Captain De Witt.'

'Of course I know his name, but that's nothing. Where does he come from?'

‘Perhaps you might find out from the visitor’s book.’

‘You are all so mighty thick with him ; your mother introducing him to me as “our friend,” and all that sort of thing.’

‘I believe he is a cousin of Sir Simon’s—down in Essex.’

‘Cousin ! A cousin means anything. Just like every man’s a captain now-a-days.’

‘Every man isn’t a gentleman,’ remarked Nell, with half-conscious emphasis. ‘But if you feel so much interest in the matter, why don’t you go to him and ask him for his credentials?’

‘He’s just the cut of the swell adventurer ; I know his style, and have a good mind to tell him so.’

‘He’s just the cut of a man who would know how to resent impertinence, so I wouldn’t advise you to try it on.’

‘Look here, Nell, I never saw such fools

as you women. I should have thought that you had had enough of those sort of fellows.'

'What sort of fellows?' she demanded, raising herself on her elbow and flushing angrily.

'You know well enough—men who run after a girl because she's money.'

'You are making two slight mistakes,' she said, with the dangerous calm often preceding a storm. 'In the first place, the fellow in question *doesn't* run after me; and in the second, he doesn't even know I have money—I believe.'

'Doesn't he? Trust him!' sneered her companion. 'And as to making up to you, do you think I have no eyes in my head?'

'It would be no loss to anybody but yourself if you hadn't,' she retorted; 'for you never see anything pleasant out of them.'

He was disconcerted for a moment, but presently continued :

‘Do you think I didn’t see the pretty picture as I came in just now?’

‘It was a very pretty picture till you spoilt it, as you do everything you come near. Did *you* see how your agreeable presence drove every one out of the room?’

‘Yes, I did,’ he retorted. ‘It isn’t so easy to humbug a silly girl before her brother.’

‘My brother!—never, thank God!’ she exclaimed, with a bitterness that surprised even herself. ‘I could never have had the ill-luck to have such a brother as you, Robert Brereton!’

‘You are very polite,’ he said, roused at last to a sullen anger. ‘It would serve you right if my father and I were to leave you to the consequences of your folly.’

‘I wish to heaven you would!’ she exclaimed passionately. ‘You both poison

my very life with suspecting evil in every one. Why mayn't I ever be allowed to exchange a friendly word without your horrid low suggestions ?'

'A friendly word !' he repeated. 'That fellow doesn't go in for friendship—he isn't such a fool.'

'He does. But why should I talk over people with you ? You are incapable of understanding anything but your own vulgar ideas. Oh, Robert Brereton,' and she turned towards him with crimson cheeks and sparkling eyes, 'what a *poor* creature you are ! I wish I had never seen you ; I should have been a happier woman.'

'You would have been a deluded and heart-broken one,' he responded, as he left the room, a little cowed by her anger.

Meanwhile Barrington had returned from his stroll with Wallace, and was taking a little boot out of his coat-pocket, and looking

at it with an expression half-affectionate, half-amused. He smiled at himself even as he detected his own lurking desire to keep that little boot in his possession. There was so much character about it; he fancied he could have picked it out from amongst many others as Nell's. It was such a determined, vigorous little boot, naughty looking even, although so prettily shaped, exactly like Nell herself, he thought. He was not a poet, nor a Frenchman, so he did not think of kissing it; but he laughed self-consciously as he rang his bell, and desired Assunta to take it with his apologies to the signorina.

CHAPTER VII.

‘WE PROMISED TO BE FRIENDS.’

‘They have most power to hurt us whom we love ;
We lay our sleeping lives within their arms.’

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THIS was not the only occasion on which De Witt was made to read aloud to his companions. It became, in fact, almost a regular institution the next few days for the little quartette to be formed in the salon, or more often on the balcony opening outside, and for Barrington to be voted into the presidential chair, and supplied with a suitable book. As Blanche remarked confidentially to her friend (and possibly also to Wallace), they could not sit talking all day long, and she for her

part certainly did not intend to go in for a course of *tête-à-tête* walks with the paragon. Barrington too seemed to have pretty well exhausted the expeditions of the island, and was generally ready enough to be at his post after lunch. On these occasions Mrs. Brereton now always acted as chaperon—a position in which she was admirably fitted to give satisfaction, inasmuch as she was very good-natured, very simple-minded, and rather sleepy. None of the four objected in the least to her presence, and her admiration of De Witt's good reading was little impaired by the fact that it usually had the effect of closing her eyes.

Meanwhile the weather continued clear, and Mr. Lingwood continued cross. He grew indeed crosser day by day, and his irritability increased visibly once or twice, when he happened to be a spectator of the reading party. He was, however, powerless to prevent it, and no one supposed that his

ill-temper had any other root than the unavoidable delay caused in their plans. Mr. Robert Lingwood also, if he had scarcely created a favourable impression on his arrival, certainly did not succeed in increasing his popularity. He appeared to every one in the light of an unsociable person ; but to De Witt he was barely civil. This fact seemed to trouble the latter but little, although perhaps it mildly astonished him ; but its demonstration more than once brought a smile of peculiar meaning to the rosy lips of Blanche Hopkins.

Truth to say, De Witt was not at this time in a mood to trouble himself particularly about the demeanour of any but one person. So long as that person were of disposition kind and gentle and friendly, little on his part was desired elsewhere. For the first time in his seven-and-twenty years he was seriously in love. Small affairs of course there had been—little

stirrings of the pulse and feelings, such as come to all men and women at times when young; but never till now a stirring which was not small, and feelings which were strangely, unaccountably deep and absorbing.

Why should they be there now? Who can say? Nell Lingwood was beautiful and sincere and lovable; but so had been many others. Why should it be she?—a question fate must answer. His hour had come.

Yet, had he ever before met any woman so full of strange, interesting contradictions, so winning in her smiles, so haughty in her coldness; any face which in its pure proud young beauty so mirrored and reflected a quick intelligence, a sensitive heart?

Nell was a very charming companion this week: she was so gay, so genial, so open-hearted; her true eyes looked so fully into Barrington's with a frank liking that

sometimes brought him misgivings, while it could not but give him pleasure.

Thus several days passed, and the girl’s foot mended rapidly. She was presently able to limp from room to room, and then to make her way up and down-stairs ; and there was no longer any reason for the Breretons to delay their departure on her account.

Yet none the less did it seem to strike De Witt with a sense of sudden upheaval,—a personal earthquake, so to speak,—when one afternoon, entering the little salon as usual, he found Mr. Brereton settling final arrangements with the landlord, preparatory to a start by the next day’s boat. He moved on into the balcony, where the two girls stood side by side, gazing towards the diamond-covered sea.

‘Is it true you all leave to-morrow?’ he asked ; and his tone had not quite its usual easy ring.

‘Isn’t it a pity?’ replied Blanche. ‘I

don't believe we shall be half as jolly at Sorrento as we've been here.'

'Are you sorry to go?' he asked, turning towards her companion.

'Yes, of course I am—we have had such a pleasant time of it,' she said readily; yet it seemed to him with a shade of constraint about her tone, as if it were a little forced.

There was a slight cloud upon her brow too, as if something had occurred to annoy her; and her eyes followed Blanche, who was sauntering slowly away, with an expression of annoyance and perplexity. But Barrington, man-like in his partial powers of observation, did not notice either of these two trifles.

'What will become of our friendship?' he asked in a lower tone, trying to look into her face. But she turned it away, and for a moment gave no answer.

Then she responded lightly, as it seemed to him—almost indifferently.

‘What becomes of most friendships?’ she inquired with a short laugh. ‘If people meet again they are sometimes renewed; but they mostly die of inanition, don’t they?’

Something about her manner perplexed and hurt him; but it might be his own awkwardness, and he felt impelled to go on now.

‘But what,’ he continued, in the same low, quiet tone, ‘if the friendship be already dead, and changed to something else?’

Mr. Brereton’s step sounded upon the balcony, and she moved hastily away.

‘Metaphysics are not in my line,’ she said quickly, and there was a sudden flush upon her brow.

The next morning the Breretons departed, and were escorted to the pier by Wallace and De Witt, one on each side of Blanche Hopkins, who preferred walking down with

the gentlemen of the party to making a third in the one springless vehicle of Capri.

‘I shouldn’t wonder if you came over to-day too,’ she remarked archly to De Witt.

‘No more should I,’ he returned. ‘I shall very likely follow you in a couple of hours in a sailing-boat.’

Not another word of a private nature had been exchanged between himself and Miss Lingwood since the previous afternoon, and the calm farewells on both sides were in marked contrast to the transparent emotion displayed by the young artist as he parted from his idol. Mrs. Brereton bade both young men a cordial adieu, remarking that she supposed they should soon have the pleasure of seeing De Witt again—an observation which drew upon her the heavy scowl of her stepson, her husband being at the moment too busy fussing over the luggage to hear her; and

the boat put off to the steamer, Wallace being left lamenting and waving his handkerchief in response to the repeated salutations of the fair Blanche.

The afternoon of the same day was drawing to a close as a small rowing-boat passed over the same track from Capri to the mainland, bearing its two passengers, a man and a dog. The dog sat blinking in the sunshine, and sleepily watching the dip of the oars into the clear malachite water; but the man was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, rowing with a long vigorous stroke that brought the perspiration to the brow of his more lethargic southern comrade.

Barrington had been divided between a departure on that day or the morrow, but finally elected to be off at once, telling himself that the cause of this decision was the irritating repetition of poor Wallace's refrain.

Blanche Hopkins was undoubtedly a

pretty girl and a nice girl, and he was the last person in the world to deny the fact; but still a constant and mournful reiteration, clothed in different forms of speech, of this interesting truth was enough to tire out any man, who for the space of several hours could not escape from the reiterator.

So, with a hearty wring of the hand, and mutual kindly wishes, De Witt parted from the artist, and found himself with his portmanteau sailing calmly over that silver sea which had so roughly treated him on his last voyage. He paid but little attention this time, however, to the passing scenery, or the conversation of the boatmen, for his mind was full.

The question upon which it was at work was a somewhat vexing and perplexing one; nevertheless, before he had reached his destination he had solved it to his own satisfaction.

He had gone too far now to retract: the greatest wish of his life, as it seemed to him, was at stake, and must be settled one way or the other.

Her conduct yesterday had been enigmatical, wounding; but it was possible that she had not meant it to be so. She was at all times a girl somewhat difficult to understand—her moods were variable; but a heart tender and earnest existed somewhere, concealed beneath her many eccentricities, and it had sometimes seemed to him that he had not failed to touch it. In any case, if it were not so, he had better know the truth; he was too much in earnest to be debarred by the fear of a repulse.

Having made up his mind, De Witt felt once more a man, and almost at his ease. He would seek her out at her hotel, and, so soon as the opportunity could be found or made, would ask her plainly to become his wife. He was not a rich man,

but he had enough to support a moderate establishment, and at some future day, perhaps not very far off, would be in a far better position than now.

But Fate brought sooner than he expected the opportunity before him—laid it, indeed, as one may say, at his feet. He had scarcely landed on the little stone causeway, and given instructions regarding his hotel, before he became aware of a solitary figure seated at some little distance upon the pebbly shore. The figure had its head turned away from him, and had evidently not perceived either boat or passenger; but De Witt had little difficulty in recognizing Nell Lingwood.

He paused a moment; then sending on the porter with his luggage, strode quickly across the narrow strand. She appeared to be deep in thought, for she did not turn her head until he was close upon her, and then she started and changed colour visibly.

It seemed almost for a moment as if she thought of rising and hurrying from him ; but the next she forced a smile to her lips, and greeted him with an easy manner.

‘Why, Captain de Witt, over already ! You are not long after us.’

‘No,’ he said gravely, standing beside her ; ‘I did not mean to be.’

His manner discomposed her, and she could think of nothing to say for a moment. Then she looked up laughing, but without meeting his gaze.

‘You should have spared us all those harrowing good-byes,’ she remarked lightly, ‘if you meant to reappear so soon.’

‘Were they harrowing ?’ he asked in the same tone ; ‘they seemed to me very superficial ones.’

‘Surely,’ she said quickly, ‘you cannot say that of our friend the artist and of Blanche ? Their parting was enough to move a sensitive heart to tears, was it not ?’

Barrington perceived her desire to avoid deep waters, but it did not move him from his resolution; on the contrary, it fixed him in a more dogged determination.

‘Don’t let us talk of Wallace and Miss Hopkins,’ he said; ‘I want to talk of you—and myself.’

She turned away with the air of a petulant child.

‘*I* don’t,’ she said; ‘I would rather talk of them.’

The blood was rising to his cheeks, but it was too late to put him off now. If she cared nothing at all for him, then her voice, her eyes, her whole self had lied to him this last pleasant week—so he told himself.

‘You had better let me say what I have to say,’ he remarked gently. ‘If I am wrong, it will only hurt myself, not you. But I think you must know what it is. We promised to be friends, did we not, Nell?’

‘Yes,’ she said, half inarticulately, her face still turned away.

‘Nell, I promised always to speak the truth to you. I can be a friend no longer—I must be something more. Will you tell me that I may?’

She made a gesture which he did not understand; and he knelt beside her on the shingle, trying to see into her averted face.

‘Can you not give me a little hope? You have guessed it, have you not—how much I care for you?’

Then she suddenly turned towards him, and the expression of her features startled him. Pain and anger, distress and perplexity were written upon them, and her lips quivered.

‘Why do you speak to me in that way?’ she asked, as it seemed to him indignantly. ‘Why can’t you let things be as they were?’

‘Because it is impossible,’ he replied. ‘I must know one way or the other. It is

surely no sin to love you. Do you dislike me so much ?' he added quickly.

'I liked you as a friend—very much.'

'Can you never like me as something more?'

She gave a movement of repulsion.

'I believed in you !' she exclaimed, half passionately. 'But when you talk in that way, I think I hate you !'

He rose suddenly.

'I apologize. In what way do my words offend ?'

'They transgress the covenant of friendship.'

Her tone had regained its calm, and was cold and formal.

For a moment he glanced at her half incredulously ; then, with a bitter smile, he lifted his cap.

'The offence shall not be repeated,' he said, and he turned and moved away.

At the commencement of the ascent he abruptly encountered Blanche Hopkins.

‘Oh, Captain De Witt, I am going to Nell! Is she there?’

He pointed silently to where the solitary figure sat motionless upon the shore, and Blanche, glancing up, caught sight of an unusual expression in the blue eyes.

‘I hope you are coming to stay here, Captain De Witt?’ she said.

‘No, Miss Hopkins, I am off to-day to Castellamare, and shall hope to sleep in Naples.’

‘I’m sorry, very sorry. I hope we shall see you again some day, Captain De Witt. I shall never forget our pleasant times at Capri.’

He laughed, but there was little mirth in his laugh.

‘Pleasant things sometimes disagree with people, don’t they?’ he said, as he took her outstretched hand.

‘Good-bye,’ she said, with a cordial warmth in her manner; ‘I wish you happiness and

success in your future life, for I think you deserve it.'

'Do people always get their deserts, do you think?' he asked, with another hard smile, as he shook her hand and moved on.

A few moments later, Blanche had flung herself down upon the stones beside her friend.

'Captain De Witt is gone,' she remarked tentatively.

'Is he?' was the laconic reply.

'Did you send him off?'

'I fail to understand you.'

'It's clear enough what I mean, I guess,' retorted Blanche uncivilly. 'You can't deceive me, Nell; I know he came up here to propose to you.'

'If you know everything, why do you ask?'

'And you refused him? Did you, Nell?'

Her companion was silent.

Blanche’s anger rose.

‘Well, Nell Lingwood, I always thought you a fool about men, but you are a bigger fool to-day even than I gave you credit for! You don’t deserve to have such another chance—a man kind and handsome and well-bred!’

The other turned upon her with flashing eyes.

‘If I am such a fool, had you not better leave me alone to my folly?’

‘Yes,’ retorted Blanche promptly; ‘and I guess I couldn’t leave you in worse company!’

And she rose and walked away in an anger that, even before she had regained the hotel, was beginning to turn to pity for the companion, whose position she understood and commiserated in her warm little heart.

Meanwhile Nell Lingwood sat on motionless, her hands clasped about her knees, her eyes fixed upon the far-reaching sea.

For an hour or more she so remained, still as a carved statue, impassive as a statue also in expression, save for the pallor that crept more and more over the delicately-cut features, the oval cheek.

‘The offence shall not be repeated.’

De Witt’s last words kept ringing in her ears, recurring again and again like a wearying chime of bells; and again and again she saw the look of pain, of astonishment, of wounded pride upon the face bent down to hers.

What had she done? Was it true that she had of her own doing put away a great happiness from her—driven away for a mere petulant whim, for the mere indulgence of an irritated pride, the one man she had ever felt inclined to love? She was indeed, as Blanche had said, a fool—a cruel, contemptible fool! He had not gone three yards from her when she recognized the truth—that she would have given all

she possessed to recall him. But it was too late—it would always be too late now. ‘The offence would never be repeated.’ Of course not. She had made her own burden, and she must bear it. She had spurned him from her, and he was gone—for ever.

She sat on long, with fixed and stupid eyes that saw nothing, and stiff limbs that had no energy to move homewards. One idea and one thought only possessed her, body and soul.

When at length she rose, and slowly dragged herself up the steep pathway to the town, there was a strange soreness in her heart such as she had never experienced before, and a strained look upon her features, which, strive as she might to conceal it, betrayed something of her secret to her keen-eyed friend. But never a word passed between them, then or later, upon the subject.

Happy is it for those of us who have never learnt that bitter lesson of life's teaching—that the deepest of all the graves of hope are those dug by our own hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS HOPKINS RECALLS THE PAST.

‘The merest unregarded thing,
Dropped into this my solitude,
Fills all my soul with echoing
Of dreams—as in some haunted wood,
A pebble’s plash into a spring
Is by the circling air renewed.’—JOHN PAYNE.

MORE than three months had elapsed. It was now towards the end of July, and the London season was beginning to show symptoms of a sure decay. The streets of the metropolis were hot and dusty; even the parks had lost their first cool freshness in the long drought, and none but the most inveterate season-mongers — needy adventurers on the look-out for an heiress, or dowagers with a numerous brood of

chickens to dispose of—but looked forward with relief to their approaching release from the social strain of exhausted atmospheres and unceasing small-talk, and escape towards the refreshing scent of country meadows, or the musical sound of the falling waves.

But if London had been hot, Italy naturally had been worse; if her streets were full of a suffocating dust, and her parks parched for want of rain, the streets and public gardens of Florence had suffered still more. The Lung' Arno was a perfect furnace, and even the Cascine proved an insufficient refuge from the pitiless rays of a southern sun; and De Witt had been forced to fly and take refuge on his native soil. He had no intention of remaining any length of time in England, however; he should probably go south again next winter,—unless indeed he went north instead,—but for the moment he had formed

no other plans, and it seemed the easiest thing to do. He felt that he was leading an aimless sort of existence, and it did not please him. He had half a mind to go out to Africa in the autumn, and see a little wild life and sport for himself—or possibly to South America, to have a look at primeval forests and Mexican relics.

Meanwhile, attracted, like every Englishman on returning home, to the metropolis, he was spending an idle week or two in his old lodgings, seeing what was to be seen, and renewing acquaintance with former friends. He did not seem to have any very special interest in all this, and he sometimes wondered to himself how blasé he had grown of late. Perhaps that episode at Capri had a little changed and hardened him, as such episodes are apt to do. It is not altogether good for a man to be disappointed in his ideal.

He told himself that he did not regret Miss Lingwood any longer—that he was

not one to cry over spilt milk, or think twice over a girl who had refused him ; and it was perhaps true. The sting lay in the fact that she had, by her conduct, lowered his standard of the truth of womanhood, and forced him to think lightly of one whom he had mentally endowed with every feminine grace and virtue.

His thoughts were perhaps not far out of this direction, as he stood one morning before a picture in one of the rooms of the Royal Academy. It was a sketch taken in Capri—a scene he knew well, and where he had more than once wandered in company with Nell Lingwood and her friend—a view of wild rocks and wilder sea, faithfully represented. And De Witt felt himself once more on the little island ; the sea breezes were playing round him, and Nell's voice was in his ear.

For the moment the crowd around him faded and had no existence ; and he turned

with a visible start when a pleasant little voice, with a Yankee accent, sounded his name, and some one touched him lightly on the elbow. It seemed strange to discover Blanche Hopkins standing beside him; and De Witt's eyes involuntarily glanced around, with a sort of vague expectation of seeing Nell herself not far off. But Blanche was alone, as she speedily informed him.

‘I'm with other friends now,’ she said, avoiding by a sort of instinct the names of her former companions; ‘I'm stopping in London with them. But they've been here already so often that they didn't want to come again, so I just came off by myself. I'm so glad to meet you again, Captain De Witt.’

‘And I you,’ he replied, cordially.

‘You looked at me as if I were a ghost at first!’ she remarked, with her merry laugh. ‘But I don't wonder you were

interested by that picture. Isn't it true? I've been back and back to it again and again. That's how I happened upon you. Have you been here before?'

'Once or twice,' said Barrington.

'Well, then, I want you should just take me round, and show me which are the best pictures—considered the best of the year—if it doesn't trouble you too much.'

'Not at all! I shall like it. But I can only tell you which are the most thought of—I am not enough of an artist to be sure they are the best really.'

'That's enough for me,' she replied.

Blanche was faultlessly dressed, and looking extremely pretty; and De Witt, in escorting her round, experienced the somewhat empty satisfaction of a man conscious that he is regarded with envious eyes as a lucky fellow by most of his fellow-men. At the end of about half-an-hour, however, she declared herself tired of pictures,

and anxious to escape from the crowded heat of the building.

‘I’ve had enough of it,’ she said; ‘I think I’ll go home now. I guess I’ll walk back across the park. It isn’t far.’

‘In that case,’ said Barrington, ‘I will walk with you, if I may.’

The park seemed a delicious refuge after the noisy broiling streets; and the two lingered slowly in the shade, by degrees finding themselves once more picking up the threads of intimacy woven during merry hours at Capri. When at length De Witt proposed a short rest on a bench beneath the trees, Blanche made no objection; and their talk insensibly drifted back to those past times. De Witt might have fancied the subject would be one of constraint to him, but it was not so. Blanche was so cordial, so natural, so unconstrained herself, that by degrees he fell into the same mood.

The Breretons, she informed him, were

now at their country house ; they had returned to England early in May, and after spending only three weeks in town had moved on northwards. She herself parted from them at Siena, remaining in that interesting old town with some newly-made acquaintances several weeks longer. In fact, she had landed but a few days ago, rejoining the friends with whom she was to stay until, a few months later, she returned to America.

‘We never had such good times again after we left Capri,’ she remarked.

‘How was that ?’ he asked, after a pause.

‘I don’t know. Robert Brereton spoilt everything ; and Nell didn’t seem to have the same spirit for things.’

‘Did Miss Lingwood’s foot get quite well again ?’ he inquired, wondering at himself for caring to speak again about this girl.

‘Oh, it wasn’t her foot—that was well enough ; it was her spirits. You see,

Captain De Witt, I think we all quarrelled at Sorrento—which isn't inspiring now, is it?' And she laughed a little.

'I should think it would be difficult to quarrel with you—you have too sweet a temper,' remarked Barrington, a little absently.

'Oh, no, it isn't! it's not sweet at all when I'm mad. And I am sometimes mad with Nell.'

He was silent; but after another short pause she continued, playing with the fringe of her parasol,—

'I'm sorry for Nell, real sorry for her sometimes. She's got a fine nature, Captain De Witt, but it's been warped by that step-father and brother of hers. They are both poor, mean sort of natures, those two.'

Barrington assented silently, and she went on:

'It's an awful drawback to a girl to have money, and to have people round her

always dinning it into her ears that—that—'

'That every man who pays her any attention is a fortune-hunter?' he asked with perfect calmness, but with a slight curl upon his lip.

'Well, it isn't only that. But she meets with so many who *are* it—don't you see? And if she has no one with a pound of common sense to help her, what is a girl to do?'

'It is certainly a hard case,' he replied in the same tone.

'It's quite different in America,' she continued; 'it's all very well to talk of the "almighty dollar," and that sort of thing,—I guess it *is* almighty, and in other countries as well as America—but we make our money quicker, and we don't think as much about losing it. My father's a rich man himself,—made his fortune in oil,—and I'm his only child; but things don't afflict

me as they do Nell. I shouldn't care one red cent if I did find a man making up to me for the sake of my money—I should soon find him out, I guess, and laugh at him. And it wouldn't make me afraid of the honest ones afterwards. But I guess if poor Nell ever thought of taking a fancy to any one, that old Brereton would do his best to poison her mind against him.'

'Why?' asked De Witt shortly, half annoyed with himself for the query which politeness seemed to require.

'Well, you see, there's a very pretty allowance for Nell, which they would lose if she were to marry. And I don't think either Mr. Brereton or his precious son Robert are particularly fond of parting with money when they have once got a good hold of it.'

'Mrs. Brereton is not like that?'

'Oh, no, she isn't mercenary. But then any one can see she isn't over-wise—even her daughter.'

Barrington made no reply, and a long silence ensued, which Blanche presently broke by jumping up.

‘I’m afraid I’ve talked scandal, some,’ she remarked; ‘you must please forget it all, Captain De Witt.’

Which of course was the last thing she intended him to do.

He made no response save by smiling; and as they walked on, their conversation turned to other subjects.

‘Are you remaining long in London?’ she presently asked.

‘No; I believe I am going into the country next week—on a visit to my cousin in Sussex.’

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed; and immediately checked herself. ‘Is that the cousin I heard you name once when we were abroad?’

‘Sir Simon? Probably it was.’

‘Shall you have a nice party there?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure. I’m going for

the shooting. But there will be one nice person there, I know.'

'And who is she, Captain De Witt?'

'Now, Miss Hopkins, why do you jump to the conclusion that it's a she at all? But, as it happens, you are correct.'

'Of course I am. What's she like— young or old?'

'Well,' said Barrington (who was certainly charitable on the score of a lady's age), '*I* call her young, but possibly you might call her old.'

'I'm getting interested, Captain De Witt. Is she pretty?'

'She has just missed being beautiful, to my mind.'

'Oh!' gasped Blanche curiously. Then she gave a sudden jump to a solution. 'Why, perhaps it's your sister.'

'No, I am sorry to say I have no sister. But it's my aunt.'

'Oh!' repeated the mystified girl; whilst

Barrington laughed heartily, enjoying the joke.

They had now reached Miss Hopkins's destination, and there was no opportunity for further conversation, as De Witt declined her invitation to enter the house. But, as he lit his cigar, and turned slowly back across the park, the American girl stood for a moment contemplating his retreating figure. It was a well-knit, athletic figure, and—albeit without any deviation in constancy to a certain person left behind in the far West—belonged to a man greatly admired by the fair Blanche. But her regrets at this moment, as she stood looking after him, were purely vicarious.

She was wondering, after the fashion of the daughters of Eve, when they rashly pick up edged tools in their dainty little fingers,—as is sometimes their wont,—whether she had handled them with sufficient delicacy?

‘At any rate,’ she said to herself, as she turned away and entered the doorway, ‘I didn’t let out half I know. I guess I was pretty prudent, any way, about Sir Simon’s.’

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

‘A house without books is like a body without a soul.’
CICERO.

‘WELL, Barry, so here you are at last!’

‘Here I am, my venerable aunt, as you remark; and as hungry as a hunter. I hope you don’t dine at a very fashionable hour, Simon?’

‘Eight o’clock,’ replied the first voice; ‘but here is a cup of tea to keep you going, greedy boy.’

The speaker was a woman not young, but of singular attractions. There was something about Judith Collyer—a freshness, a purity of look and voice which might have passed unnoticed in a crowd, but which

made those who had once turned their eyes towards her look again and again. Was it also the beauty of the large dark eyes, the pale transparency of the soft skin, and the fine lines of a slightly sarcastic mouth—or perhaps the little high-bred air of reticence, seeming to imply a strong and impulsive nature held in check by a still stronger will?

‘Now,’ she continued, ‘let me look at you. You don’t look as blooming as I expected after your travels, Barry.’

‘*You* look as blooming as ever, and as wicked,’ he remarked disrespectfully, as he bent to kiss her cheek. ‘What mischief have you been up to lately, Miss Judy?’

‘None worth mentioning, dear boy; times have been dull. Everything and everybody has been stagnating since you left home. It’s so good of Simon to try to wake us up a bit.’

‘Is he going to wake us up?’

Ever since she could remember Miss Collyer had been on intimate terms with the baronet. He was in fact a distant cousin of her father's, and had, as a young man, been enslaved and tyrannized over by the sparkling little girl, in much the same way as he loved now to be teased and patronized by the pretty graceful woman. At his house it had been that Judith's eldest sister, Barrington's mother, had first met her future husband, Mr. De Witt; and the friendship had never been dropped.

He was a quiet, elderly gentleman, who now stood by smiling, but saying nothing. It seemed to be a proceeding to which he was well accustomed to be spoken of in the third person whilst present, and he appeared well enough content to let some one else be sponsor of his replies.

So it was now, as Aunt Judith answered promptly,—

‘Rather! We’ve got nine people already

in the house, and a couple more coming to-morrow. And there's a tennis and archery party here to-morrow, and a fancy ball at Chudsworth on Thursday.'

'Ghost of my grandmother!' exclaimed Barrington. 'I thought it was a sociable trio made up of you and I and Simon there. I might have left my evening pumps behind. And are you going to the ball, Aunt Judy?'

'Of course! I've settled to go as the "Decayed Gentlewoman," the typical specimen, you know. And I think a sort of mouldy green would be the proper colour for my dress; and I might have it trimmed with a few dead leaves. That would be a lovely high-art admixture, would it not?'

'Green wouldn't suit your complexion, Aunt Judy,' said her nephew gravely.

But, as Sir Simon left the room, Miss Collyer turned her dark eyes searchingly towards her companion.

‘What have you been doing, Barry?’ she asked suddenly. The unexpectedness of the assault a little took him aback. ‘You have been worrying yourself about something,’ she said gently.

‘Never mind, Aunt Judy; one can’t go through life on rose-leaves, you know.’

‘I think *you* ought, dear; you are so good and kind.’

And she stroked his hair with a caressing hand.

‘But I don’t want to know about it, Barry,’ she continued; ‘that is quite unnecessary.’

‘Yes,’ he said, half wearily, ‘it’s of no use talking over some worries, even with any one as kind as you are, Aunt Judy. But it is very pleasant to be coaxed and flattered again.’

‘Oh, Barry, I always tell you of your faults when I see them!’

‘Well, I suppose I must go and dress.

Somehow, one feels this houseful rather a bore. Where are they all now?’

‘In their warrens, adorning for conquest at dinner. And you and I shall be unadorned if we don’t look sharp.’

‘I fancied I was coming down here to chaperon you and Simon.’

‘Why, you don’t mean to say you—*you*, spoilt creature—would reduce yourself to a gooseberry?’

‘Oh, I shouldn’t mind it with you two. I should like to see old Simon spooning you.’

‘Barry, you mustn’t talk in that way; I don’t like it!’

‘Why, you don’t mean to say you don’t know how gone he is on you, and has been for years?’

‘If I thought there was anything—that mattered—do you think I should be here now?’

‘Why not? Must he be deprived of the

pleasure of seeing you because you won't marry him?'

'Oh, dear boy, don't talk like that. Do you know, you've grown very silly? A winter in Italy has deteriorated your good sense.'

And Judith Collyer ran away laughing.

When, twenty minutes later, De Witt descended once more, not to the little morning-room this time, but to the large drawing-room, he found it fairly well filled with guests, some outsiders, some visitors staying in the house. The room was somewhat dimly lit by half a dozen moderator lamps, and in the semi-gloom, Barrington fancied that all the company were strangers to him. As he turned, however, to glance at a row of ladies seated upon a divan not far from the door, his gaze was arrested by a figure almost at his elbow—a girl dressed in a simple white silk, whose face was almost as white as her

dress ; and he started with surprise. For a moment he thought he must be deceived ; then he remembered his first day's acquaintance with Mrs. Brereton, and how she had spoken of his cousin, Sir Simon, as a mutual friend. It was indeed Nell Lingwood. Had he contemplated this meeting he certainly would have thought twice about accepting Simon's invitation.

Meanwhile their eyes had met, and he had the poor satisfaction of perceiving that if the rencontre were in any degree startling and discomposing to himself, it was not less so to her. It was too late for her to avoid recognition if she had wished to do so ; but as she returned his stiff bow, a vivid flush spread across her face from brow to chin, and he perceived that her self-possession was for the moment more lost than his own. But in truth, he had recovered himself quickly, and no stranger would have perceived any unusual inflection in the quiet

tone with which he asked her some conventional question—she knew not what—as to their return from the continent.

She made some inarticulate answer ; and when she next glanced upwards he was gone. He was not perhaps particularly hot upon renewing his acquaintance with Mrs. Brereton ; but, under the circumstances, she afforded relief, and he escaped to the opposite end of the long room, where he had caught sight of her voluminous draperies and good-natured face.

The good lady was plainly a little embarrassed when Barrington presented himself before her, although she strove hard to disguise the fact. She might have spared herself the trouble, however ; a simple mind and candid disposition always rendered disguise impossible to her. She held out her hand with a greeting that only failed in cordiality from being a little nervous.

‘ Clearly,’ thought Barrington, ‘ her

daughter has told her all that passed between us.' In which he was quite wrong. Had he known the truth, Nell had kept that episode entirely to herself. Not a syllable had passed her lips, even to her mother, on the subject; and if Mrs. Brereton guessed at all at the truth, it was simply her maternal acumen that had informed her. Her present visible constraint was indeed connected with the same cause; but was provoked by reminiscences of her husband's jealous prejudice against the young man, and the repeated scoldings he had bestowed upon her on account of her mild partiality for Barrington.

She quickly thawed, however, and resumed her old friendly tone; for, after all, Edward was not here, nor Robert, to blame or criticize, and she might please herself. Mrs. Brereton was very far from being a deceitful woman, but she was a weak-minded one, a good deal persecuted by the

male members of her household; and she had fallen naturally into the habit of a painstaking submission whilst under their surveillance, and an agreeable relaxation to her own inclinations in their absence. Besides which, she possessed to a large degree the natural penchant of the kindly British matron towards young and handsome men.

Just before dinner was announced, Judith Collyer managed to touch her cousin's elbow, and attract his attention for a moment. 'Simon,' she said softly, 'please to send Barrington in with Miss Hutchinson or Mrs. Robarts.'

'Why?' he asked vaguely. 'I had thought of giving him a chance with Miss Lingwood, the beautiful heiress.'

Miss Collyer frowned till her delicately pencilled eyebrows met across her little nose.

'No, you great stupid man, do as I tell

you ! You needn't ask why. And you needn't introduce them either ; they have met before. Do you hear me ?'

' Yes, Judith,' answered the bookworm meekly, casting a glance of satisfaction over the slight graceful figure and the pretty imperious features—and Miss Collyer moved away. She had certainly the quickest eyes in existence ; and Sir Simon, who revered her tact from afar, never dreamt of disputing her dictum on matters social.

Accordingly, a minute later, Barrington was tapped on the shoulder, and, following his host, was brought to a stand-still before Miss Hutchinson. This was a large, golden-haired young lady, quite of the modern school of accomplishments—a little fast and horsey, rather slangy, and extremely flirty. She was exceedingly vivacious in conversation, and seemed in no way discouraged by a somewhat silent companion ; on the contrary, it seemed to rouse her to a greater

sense of her obligations to society—doubtless on the principle, that if one of a couple, who should both be tolerably agreeable, is slightly dull, the other should fill up the sum total by making herself supremely agreeable.

After a time, however, he roused himself to do what was expected of him, and found that the carrying on of a conversation of the Miss Hutchinson type, even in its most brilliant phases, was not incompatible with small exertion and a somewhat pre-occupied mind. Fight against the inclination as he would, his eyes kept reverting again and again to the other side of the table, where Nell Lingwood sat with her partner, an animated young baronet, a local somebody.

Judith Collyer might prevent such a contretemps as the sending of them in together to dinner, but she could not prevent their being placed nearly opposite each other; and Barrington could not look across the table

without catching sight of her face. She looked more beautiful than ever to-night, and he was conscious of a strange mingling of two distinct and opposing sentiments—one, a sort of repulsion towards this girl who had behaved so unwarrantably, so strangely to him ; the other, of a half re-awakened love roused by her presence, her beauty, her nameless fascination.

He heard and replied to every remark made by Miss Hutchinson, yet there was scarcely a word uttered by Nell Lingwood which he missed ; and he was not slow to observe her resolutely downcast eyes, and the unusual flush which burnt upon her cheeks. He began half to pity her evident embarrassment, and tried to fancy it was the pity of indifference. Perhaps it gave her pain now to be reminded of an occasion when she had behaved with petulance, almost with insult, to one who had certainly done nothing to deserve it.

Perhaps she had convinced herself, after the event, that he, De Witt, was after all something better than an adventurer—that he was an honest man and a gentleman. Well, he had no bitterness against her; he was not ape enough to blame a girl if she did not fall in love with him—particularly a girl like this one, so beautiful, so attractive—so rich, he added to himself, with a moment's scorn.

And then he suddenly found himself looking over Miss Lingwood's companion with a close and unfriendly scrutiny that criticized his every point, and found them deficient. But still she kept her eyes lowered; she seemed to have a terror of again meeting his glance; and De Witt had an uncomfortable sensation of being in the way of her comfort, and spoiling her dinner for her.

The instincts of a gentleman made him feel as if he ought to get up and change

his place ; and, had it been possible, he would have done so. Perhaps she might have enjoyed an agreeable flirtation with that very harmless-looking young man who had taken her in if it had not been for himself. He had no wish to be Banquo's ghost to any one at the feast—however much her embarrassment would place itself before him in the light of a sort of involuntary *amende* for her former treatment of him. Perhaps also it assured him that he had not been so far wrong in his first estimate of her character. She *was* sensitive, she was generous ; if she had failed in womanly courtesy, if she had been wanting in womanly gentleness, it was the fault of a sudden impulse stirred up by outside influence, not of a disposition in itself shallow or unfeeling.

Meanwhile he would do his best to relieve her discomfort by keeping out of her sight as much as possible. Clearly, his

presence was disagreeable to her. The situation was unfortunate for both of them ; but it was his place, as a gentleman, to minimize its unpleasantness for her.

Accordingly, dinner over, he permitted Miss Hutchinson still to lead him captive in her train. He turned over her music for her when she sang, sat beside her when she unearthed a book of photographs, and managed to be deeply absorbed in a view of Naples at the moment when Mrs. Brereton and her daughter were bidding their host and Miss Collyer good night.

Then he rose, and shaking off his chains, approached the hearth-rug, gently gravitating thence towards the door, and the smoking-room beyond. He was getting rather tired of Miss Hutchinson. It must be somebody else to-morrow—Mrs. Robarts perhaps, or the baronet's shy, pink and white sister—it mattered little which. This was hard on poor Miss Hutchinson,

who, notwithstanding the somewhat sudden departure of her victim, believed his chains secure, and was already meditating another and more public procession of conquest on the morrow. But Barrington's face wore an ungenial look that night as he smoked his cigar in silence; and he contradicted poor Sir Simon rather uncivilly on the subject of his newly-imported cigars. But then, what could an old bookworm know about tobacco?

‘My dear fellow,’ he remarked, shortly, ‘what’s your opinion worth? You don’t know Shag from Cavendish.’

And Sir Simon was grieved on the score of his hospitality, and felt his young cousin was hard upon him; but took the rebuke meekly, acknowledging his ignorance upon the subject in hand.

‘I never had tobacco in my mouth but once,’ he remarked ingenuously. ‘I was twelve years old then, and the groom lent me

his pipe for a joke. I have never forgotten, all these years, how very sick it made me.'

Meanwhile, shall we glance for a moment into one of the rooms up-stairs? A large room, well and handsomely furnished, as were all the rooms at Rolston Court. But, before the luxurious bed, knelt a girl, her evening dress unchanged, her door locked. Her arms were flung across the counterpane, and her face was hidden upon her clasped hands. She was quite still, quite motionless—for girls of the stuff of Nell Lingwood find it hard to cry—perhaps all the harder when their trouble is a sore one.

There the kneeling figure remained for an hour or more. Was she reflecting? was she praying? was she suffering? Who can look inside the human heart and describe how each one of us may, in our different way, resign ourselves to reap the bitter harvest we have sown?

CHAPTER X.

JARRING ELEMENTS.

‘The more fair and crystal is the sky,
The uglier seem the clouds that in it fly.’

SHAKESPEARE.

THE next morning Barrington joined the shooting party that formed itself shortly after breakfast, and remained absent the greater part of the day, taking luncheon in the open. Towards four o’clock, however, most of the gentlemen, mindful of their duty to their host, returned in the direction of the court and the archery party, and he amongst them.

When he advanced Miss Lingwood was aiming at a target, and he observed that she was a very indifferent toxophilite. He was therefore somewhat astonished when,

after being attached for an hour to the side of Miss Hutchinson, who called him up and requested his attendance as arrow gatherer, he found the former declared by Sir Simon to be the recipient of one of the four prizes offered for competition to his guests.

‘She gained it in the first set,’ remarked Miss Hutchinson, glancing towards the pretty bracelet a little discontentedly. (She had won nothing herself.) ‘I don’t think much of archery myself,’ she continued; ‘do you? It is so old-fashioned. If it was with the rifle now, I would lay a fair wager I’d beat them all here. That’s real sport—this is baby-play. Do you admire her much?’

‘Who? Miss Lingwood?’ he asked, to gain time.

‘Yes. They make a fearful fuss over her round about here, just because she’s an heiress. She has a tremendous pot of money, they say. She’s not *my* style.’

De Witt glanced towards Nell. Miss Hutchinson's opinion did not appear to be shared by the gentlemen present, most of whom were now crowding round to congratulate her on her success. The girl's face was flushed ; but, as the smile died on her lips, and she turned to move towards the house, a peculiar sadness in her expression struck him forcibly for the first time. He was rather absent as he escorted Miss Hutchinson to the conservatories, and assisted her to choose a flower to wear in her hair that evening.

Sir Simon's party was beginning to thaw into a social intimacy by this time ; and when, after dinner, some one proposed a little carpet-hop amongst themselves, the notion was warmly greeted by most.

'You dance, of course, Captain De Witt?' inquired the lady beside him. 'Well then, there will be five couples, and a lady over to do the orchestra—quite enough.'

‘Quite,’ echoed every one ; whilst Miss Collyer exclaimed,—‘ I’m orchestra ; it’s my forte.’

‘Not till you have danced a waltz with me,’ remarked her nephew ; at the same moment stealing a glance towards Nell Lingwood.

She had remained silent when the amusement was voted ; and Barrington felt instinctively that she was the only other person in the room beside himself to whom the proposal had been distasteful. And yet surely, with that slight supple figure, and those graceful movements, dancing must come natural to her ?

He was startled from his moment’s abstraction by a pat on the arm from Aunt Judith.

‘Now then, Barrington, find your partner.’

‘You,’ he said, putting his arm round her waist.

‘Nonsense ! Fight with one of your own

size—I mean age! Oh, well, I see Mrs. Brereton has already installed herself upon the music-stool.’

‘And it isn’t big enough for you both, my aunt!’

‘No, it isn’t. Well, it’s very good-natured of her. But you oughtn’t to dance with me. Isn’t there something in the Articles against it?’

‘Do you mean,’ he asked with gravity, ‘a man may not marry his grandmother?’

‘Yes, that’s it. So a man may not waltz with his aunt.’

‘Mayn’t he? Oh, Aunt Judy, I don’t want to be bothered to talk. Do you think they would miss me if I was to slope off to bed?’

‘Of course they would, Barry.’ But Miss Collyer looked concerned. ‘Aren’t you in the mood for dancing?’

‘I don’t feel inclined for all those Miss Hutchinsons, and Mrs. Robarts’, and

people. It's such a grind to have to talk and flirt when you feel dull.'

'Poor boy!' said Judith thoughtfully.

She had too much tact to try at the present moment to probe his meaning further.

Duty, however, had to be done; and the next dance, another waltz, having been achieved with Miss Hutchinson, who was rather difficult to get rid of,—inasmuch as, at its conclusion, she suggested cups of tea, conservatory strolls, and every other innocent device for retaining her partner at her side,—Barrington found himself duly installed in a set of Lancers with Mrs. Robarts, with Miss Lingwood as the lady next beside him.

It did not add to his comfort to find, after a moment, that Nell had changed her place, and, under some pretext, put herself and her partner in another position; and he scarcely knew why he felt so disturbed, as, in the turns of the

figures, he held in his for an instant her cold limp hand, and noticed how steadfastly she avoided his eye. He was yet more angry with himself than with her, as he felt how those short touches, those brief clasps of the small unwilling hand that had once met his so genially, so frankly, even now thrilled him with an emotion that he could not suppress.

He was thankful when at length, after a few more sets, the evening was voted too hot for any more dancing; and music supervened. Everybody seemed to sing, and nearly everybody to play; and one lady created much applause by her successful performance upon the zither, an instrument which she had brought with her from the Tyrol.

Miss Lingwood, however, sat quietly in her low chair not far from the window, and resisted all entreaties; which seemed strange, as Barrington knew that her performances, both musical and vocal, were

above the average. Perhaps, however, she found her present situation too agreeable to wish to disturb it. Close beside her sat Sir Henry Lovelace, the young baronet of whom previous mention has been made, and whom De Witt overheard saying softly to his companion,—

‘I am very unselfish to press you to go, much as I love your singing; for I had rather you remained here.’

‘Barrington,’ asked Sir Simon suddenly, across the long room, ‘don’t you sing? I thought I remembered you did.’

‘Oh, yes,’ murmured the unconscious Mrs. Brereton, who had quite lapsed into her old partiality for the young man, and who had a hazy reminiscence of some Capri vocalisms—‘of course he can. Do sing us something, Captain De Witt.’

All the ladies echoed her request; and without more ado, Barrington moved to the piano.

He was not a great performer, but his voice was sweet and well-modulated, and he played as he sang—easily, without constraint or self-consciousness. His first ballad gave great satisfaction to the company; and a general request arose at its conclusion for another.

Barrington had risen, but he sat down again to comply without pressing, pausing a moment, and then commencing in a voice stronger and firmer than before. There was a half smile on his face, but a sort of defiant sadness in his heart, as he sang; and never perhaps had he given the simple little song before with so much force and expression. It was one which he had last sung at Capri, and often there—for it was Nell Lingwood's favourite, the one for which she always asked when in a music-making mood—and it seemed to bring before him with a strange clearness all the details of the shabby little hotel salon, the cracked piano,

and Nell's presence near. He had fancied he would never care to sing that song again; but he chose it now, for some unexplained motive, and sang it with a sort of bitter enjoyment that seemed to himself to express an implied scorn of former love. When it was finished he rose quickly and walked towards the window.

‘How hot it is to-night!’ he remarked, as he stepped out upon the balcony, disregarding Miss Hutchinson's pleading looks as she sat alone upon a sofa.

At the further end of the long balcony sat a figure leaning against the balustrade, and he paced towards it unconsciously. As he approached, however, the figure raised its face from where it had been hidden, lying against the cold bare stone, and looked up startled. He was almost equally startled to perceive Nell Lingwood; yet noticed the painful agitation on the pale features upraised for a moment to his in the

moonlight. The next she rose hurriedly, and before he could turn, had fled softly indoors again by one of the many open windows. He did not follow her example. He went onwards, and descending the flight of steps, turned into the darkened shrubbery below. At that moment he made up his mind. He would tell his cousin to-night that his visit must be a short one, and on the morrow he would take his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

RECONCILED.

‘Have you not heard it said full oft,
A woman’s nay doth stand for naught?’

SHAKESPEARE.

THE next morning Miss Lingwood did not appear at breakfast; and Mrs. Brereton, in answer to general inquiries, explained that her daughter was suffering from a severe headache, that might put a stop to her going to the fancy ball that night. This excited general commiseration, and a loudly-expressed chorus of regret; and one or two of the gentlemen declared that such a calamity could not for a moment be contemplated.

At luncheon, however, Nell was in her

usual place, although certainly paler than usual, and with dark rings round her eyes, much as if she had not slept all night. She appeared to be in good spirits, however, and talked fast and gaily to the man who sat beside her.

Barrington had not seen her in such good spirits since he arrived; but it did not alter his determination of taking his departure that afternoon. She should not—whatever her conduct to him had been—say of him or think of him that he had voluntarily annoyed her by his presence. But his eyes kept straying every now and then towards her end of the table. With those constant smiles upon her lips, and that brilliant sparkle in her talk, she seemed so much more like the girl he had loved at Capri, than had been his silent embarrassed neighbour of last night. Yet there was a difference about her. Perhaps the difference lay in the fact that her brilliancy,

her smiles, were now offered, not to himself, but to another man! What mattered it to him whom she favoured now? 'If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be?' And he applied himself with assiduity to the amusement of two pretty neighbours.

Lunch over, he followed his cousin into the library, asking for a time-table.

'You're not really going, I hope?' said Sir Simon. 'I didn't think you were in earnest last night. Why should you leave us in such a hurry?'

'I have business in town,' replied Barrington shortly.

'But you must stop over this fancy ball to-night, won't you?'

'Can't, old fellow; it's very good of you to wish it.'

'Oh, well,' groaned his cousin, 'if you must go, there's the time-table. But I can't let you go till after dinner. There's

the evening express at 9.30. Won't that do ?'

'All right,' said Barrington ; 'that will do.'

'Then you can say good-bye to everybody, you know ; and get a mouthful of something to eat before you start,' said the hospitable baronet, ignoring the excellent lunch from which they had just risen.

Barrington was not so sure whether he particularly wished to say good-bye to every one ; but he thanked Sir Simon, and assented as he left the room.

He felt relieved now that he had made up his mind to go, and wished that he were already in the train, rushing Town-wards. Never again, he hoped, would the doctrine of unlucky chances lead him towards another meeting with Nell Lingwood. Once out of Rolston Court, and that episode would be, he hoped, for ever closed. Thus

reflecting, somewhat sorely and impatiently, he lit his cigar and strolled out into the garden, Waif beside him as usual, pacing on slowly down one of the long and winding walks.

Suddenly, as he turned the corner of the shrubbery, he paused. He had come in sight of a solitary figure seated upon the garden bench at the angle of the pathway just under the big beech tree. The figure had a somewhat drooping and despondent attitude, such as would perhaps come naturally to a person suffering from a bad headache; and at sight of it De Witt stood reflecting a moment—with a sudden impulse then flinging away his cigar, and walking slowly onwards.

She started visibly as he approached her, for the walk was so covered with moss that she had not heard his footsteps until he was almost beside her. Her face had been white and sorrowful a moment before; but

now, as it turned towards him, a vivid flush suffused her cheeks, and a stiff constraint made itself felt in her manner.

De Witt raised his cap slightly as he stood before her.

‘Allow me,’ he said quietly, ‘to hope that your headache will soon mend, and that you will be able to take part in the festivities this evening. I am called away, and shall not be there, so will take this opportunity of saying good-bye.’

Was he speaking in sarcasm or in all simplicity? It was beyond his companion’s power to say; but she guessed intuitively at the cause of his sudden departure.

Her colour had quickly faded, and her voice was very formal as she answered—although she herself heard plainly enough the tremor that ran through it,—

‘Are you going so soon? I fancied you were stopping several days.’

‘It was only this morning that I found

I must leave. I should be sorry,' he added, after a moment, unable quite to restrain his bitterness, 'to remain where I had reason to believe my presence was a burden to any lady in the house.'

'A burden!' she murmured incoherently, the hot red once more spreading over her cheeks.

'A burden,' he repeated calmly. 'Let me hope now that you will enjoy a pleasant evening, Miss Lingwood, since I shall not be there to annoy you by my company.'

'It would not annoy me—' She hesitated, anger and pain struggling together in her voice.

'Indeed? Well, I prefer to avoid the chance of it. Good afternoon.' And once more raising his hat, and without glancing at the girl's face, he turned upon his heel and sauntered slowly off.

What instinct was it—what good or bad angel of his—that prompted him, when

almost out of sight, to turn once more and glance backwards?

The solitary figure still sat where he had left it, but now all crouched and bent together; the head was buried in the hands, and even at this distance, De Witt could see how the slight shoulders shook and quivered with unrestrained emotion.

‘Nell! why are you crying?’

At the sudden sound of his voice, striking so unexpectedly upon her ear, she sprang up as if she had been shot, her eyes flashing, her face crimson.

But it was too late to hide the streaming tears from his sight. He took her two hands in his almost sternly, and forced her to look at him.

‘What does it all mean?’ he asked. ‘Nell, you *don't* hate me! Why do you make us both so miserable?’

Then, as she still strove to hide her face,

the passionate sobs still rising in her throat, he went on :

‘You may deceive in your words, you may be cold in your manner, but your eyes cannot tell me lies. Nell, you care for me—why do you pretend you don’t?’

‘I never pretended,’ she said in a low voice, as he drew her towards him; ‘it was all wrong together—you didn’t understand.’

Then, as he put his arm round her, she suddenly clung to him, sobbing,

‘Oh, don’t go away again!’

‘Am I likely?’ he asked. ‘Nell, you know if I ever went away willingly. You drove me from you.’

‘It has been such a long, long time,’ she sighed.

‘It has been very long to me,’ he said gravely. ‘And it came near to being for ever, Nell; for I should never have come back after this time.’

‘Oh, it was so cruel of you—you spoke so hardly!’

‘Nell, I can’t understand; you talk now as if *I* had changed to you.’

‘So you did, I thought.’

‘Instead of which, it is you who behaved badly to me. Have you forgotten that day at Sorrento?’

‘Ah, but I had not had time then. If you only knew it all— You said we were to be friends only.’

‘Till we could be something better.’

‘But I didn’t want you to be anything better—not at first. And you didn’t put it in that way at first.’

‘Why, of course I didn’t—at first. Perhaps I didn’t know it myself then. A man doesn’t propose to a girl the first day he sees her.’

‘Don’t laugh at me! If you knew everything, you wouldn’t.’

‘Can’t you tell me everything?’

‘Papa and Robert never would believe

in your—friendship. And I was sure you meant it really, and said so. I didn't want you to be like all the others—not then.'

'What others?' asked Barrington, half mystified, half amused.

'If you laugh I can't tell you. It all seems so silly and horrid now; but it has been a dreadful trouble to me all my life. Didn't I seem suspicious and cold to you sometimes—at first?'

'I thought you seemed to have a poor opinion of my sex in general—sometimes,' he responded.

'You wouldn't wonder if you knew. It began when I was only sixteen or seventeen, at school, and it was always going on after I grew up. And papa and Robert told me girls with money were always treated so, and must beware of everybody. And once I had a horrid lesson. I don't like to tell you.'

'Please tell me,' said Barrington; 'you can whisper it, you know—I have very sharp ears.'

‘Well, it was a gentleman,—and he seemed a really nice man,—and he was clever and good-looking, and I thought he really cared for me. I wasn’t in love with him, you know,’—she paused,—‘but he *was* very nice, and I was only nineteen, and I did think he was in earnest. And I was sorry for him, and had half made up my mind to think about it,—only to think about it, you know,—when some one, a friend of papa’s, brought a letter to show him written by this man—such a horrid letter.’

‘What did it say?’

‘Well—now don’t laugh this time! It was very silly to mind, I suppose, but in it he called me Miss Moneybags, and—and it showed he didn’t really care one bit.’

‘The cad!’ exclaimed Barrington. ‘I don’t think it was at all silly to mind. You had a lucky escape, Nell. So you have been afraid of everybody since, poor little girl?’

‘I began to think everybody came for my money, not for me—’

‘Why, Nell, you little goose, you brown-eyed witch,’ and he emphasized each epithet with a delicious kiss upon the soft white forehead lying against his shoulder, ‘do you know yourself so little as not to have discovered yet that you have beauty enough to dower half a dozen penniless girls, and to turn a man’s head?’

‘No,’ she whispered; ‘I don’t think any one really finds me very attractive—except you.’

‘That’s because you are such a cold little icicle. So you have made up your mind that I’m not a fortune-hunter, eh, Nell?’

‘Oh, don’t; you make me feel so ashamed of myself—’

‘Not at all. I don’t see how you could help yourself. Perhaps Mr. Brereton and—Robert—may still regard me in that light?’

‘I cannot tell what they may do, and I do not care—not one scrap now. They are not my masters.’ And she drew herself up proudly.

‘I like to see you look like that, Nell; it is like your old self, the girl I fell in love with—’

‘And who treated you so badly?’

‘Well, she did. But she was my queen then; and now I have got back my queen. It didn’t feel at all the thing to have her crying and confessing her sins just now, like any other common-place, humble-minded girl.’

‘I did not confess any sins!’

‘That’s right; I like that sparkle. My queen is always a trifle haughty by nature.’

‘Oh, Barrington, how long have we sat here? I must go in.’

‘You will be chilly if you sit any longer. But won’t it do if we walk up and down?’

‘No, it won’t; I must go in at once.’

Besides, you know, you have to pack your portmanteau !'

'Oh, ah ! to be sure I have.'

'Barrington ! you don't mean it ?'

'Oh, my queen, do you want me to stay ? Well, under all the circumstances, perhaps my business may wait—that is to say, if your head promises to get well enough for the ball to-night.'

'It is quite well already. Drop my arm now, if you please.'

'Are you afraid of meeting any one ?'

'You know I am not ! Am I afraid of anybody in the world ?' she asked scornfully.

'A little afraid of me—but that is right.'

Nell did not descend for afternoon tea ; and when, a little later, Mrs. Brereton proceeded to her daughter's room to make inquiries, she found the invalid in a strange mood. The girl had been pale and silent all morning—her headache had seemed to

depress her to an unusual extent; but now her mother found her seated in a low chair before the window, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright, and her lips smiling. She looked like a fair type of happiness personified, her whole expression so different from that of the last few months, that Mrs. Brereton stood amazed.

‘Well,’ said the latter, entering, ‘your head seems well, at any rate, my dear.’

‘Quite, quite well, dear mamma.’

‘Then I suppose you will go to the ball?’

‘Yes, dear mother.’

The contented radiance of her smile could not fail to strike Mrs. Brereton. She was not a clever or an observant woman, but she was a mother, and a kindly one, where her natural disposition was not perverted.

‘Nell,’ she exclaimed suddenly, ‘what has happened to you?’ and she bent down to look more closely into the beautiful features.

Nell's answer was to draw her face still lower downwards, and to cover it with kisses.

‘Only that I have found out at last, mother,’ she whispered softly, ‘what it is to be happy—to be perfectly happy, to have nothing left to wish for on earth!’

Mrs. Brereton raised herself with a startled countenance.

‘Oh, Nell, what do you mean?’

‘I mean what I say, mother. After months of sorrow—oh, such sorrow!—I have come to perfect happiness. Mother, have you never seen, all these weary months, how sad at heart I have been?’

‘I have often thought that something weighed upon your mind, Nell; but you never would let me know what it was.’

‘No, mother, I never would have told you if things had not come right. Perhaps it was wrong and proud of me, but I had brought my own trouble on myself, and I meant to bear my punishment in silence.

But now that it has all come right, and that he has spoken to me again, I can tell you about it. He spoke to me first that day at Sorrento, the first day we were there. Don't look so mystified, mother, you know whom I am speaking of.'

'Captain De Witt?' asked Mrs. Brereton.

'Yes. Well, I was horrid to him then. Oh, mother, I behaved like a brute. I was vexed, I think, because of all the nasty things papa and Robert had said about him, and because I had always declared he only wished to be my friend,—you know, mother,—and I hardly knew then how much I cared for him. But I knew it directly I had sent him away. I thought I must have been mad to speak to him in the way I had; but it was too late, I knew he never would come back. And he never would have done so if I had not met him here, and if—' She paused, whilst the vivid colour deepened on her cheeks.

‘It was good of him, so generous of him, mother, to come back to me ; for I had insulted him that day, and I knew it. And, oh, I have felt all these months as if my heart were breaking ; it seemed to get worse every day, having to hide it and to pretend to be the same as ever. I sometimes felt as if it would kill me ; and the last three days have been the worst of all. But I don’t mind anything now—even all that misery seems like a dream now. I can think of nothing except how happy I am. It seems too much happiness for any one human being to have ; it almost frightens me, mother !’

Mrs. Brereton did not withdraw the hand which her daughter was softly caressing, as she poured out her simple, passionately-worded story ; but her face wore a perturbed expression, and after Nell had finished speaking, she remained silent for several seconds.

‘You are not vexed, dearest?’ asked the girl gently, as she laid her flushed cheek against her mother’s hand and pressed it there.

‘N—o,’ replied the other slowly; ‘I suppose it can’t be helped. But,’ she continued, after a moment’s pause, ‘I am afraid it will bring trouble, my dear.’

‘I know what you are thinking of, mother. But why need we trouble about that yet? Let us be happy while we may. I think I shall be strong enough to bear a little worry and opposition over this. And you like him, mother, do you not? Say you do!’

‘I thought him a very pleasant and gentlemanly person at Capri,’ said Mrs. Brereton guardedly.

‘You will soon think more than that of him, mother. But I will be satisfied if you will only say you are glad to see your child so happy.’

‘I should like you always to be that, I am sure, Nell, my dear.’

‘I know you would, mother. Mother, we have two days longer, perhaps three, to enjoy ourselves in. You won’t tell any one before then, will you?’

‘No, I suppose not. I hope it isn’t wrong.’

‘How can it be wrong? You would not have known if I had not told you; and I am not a child, I am twenty-two. And after that, mother, I will fight the battle, and I will bear the brunt. I will save you all I can.’

‘Oh, my dear,’ sighed the poor woman, ‘how can you? It is impossible; you don’t understand.’

‘I think I understand, mother; but I will do all I can to save you. I have often been impatient and hot-tempered, dear, I know; but this time I will be so patient that they will not be able to quarrel with

me, and yet so firm that they will find it useless to oppose me. But don't let us think of that yet, dear mother, let us forget it all for these few days.'

Mrs. Brereton kissed the upturned, pleading face.

'You shall be happy, my dear,' she said. 'Take your three days—one is not young twice.' And she sighed a quiet sigh full of repressed pathos.

It was nearly dark when, some time later, she left her daughter's room and proceeded towards her own, to dress for dinner. In the corridor she suddenly encountered a figure that had been springing up the stairs two steps at a time, and which paused with a smiling face at her approach.

'Oh, Captain De Witt!' she exclaimed, unable to keep silence with her heart so full.

He held out his hand with a beaming smile. 'She has told you?'

‘Yes—yes, she’s told me.’ And she took his hand half reluctantly.

‘You don’t object, I hope—mamma?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure. Oh dear me!’ she exclaimed helplessly.

‘Well, you know,’ he said persuasively, ‘it must have come some time, mustn’t it? She must have married some one some day, mustn’t she?’

‘I don’t know what Mr. Brereton will say to it.’

It was on the end of Barrington’s tongue to inquire what the dickens it mattered what Mr. Brereton might say upon the subject, but he was too happy to be cantankerous. So instead—

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you don’t object to me personally, do you, Mrs. Brereton?’

‘I? Oh, I always liked you, you know, Captain De Witt.’

‘Then I don’t mind any one else.’

‘But we mustn’t be rash about these things.’

‘But you don’t refuse your sanction, do you?’

‘Oh, *I* am nobody, you know.’

‘You are everybody—to her and to me.’

Despite her nervous fears, Mrs. Brereton felt herself smiling into the handsome face, with the boyish light-heartedness of the clear blue eyes.

‘I am sure you are fond of her. I shall tell him so,’ she remarked vaguely.

She was considerably flurried, however, when Barrington suddenly bent down and gave her a kiss.

‘How nice you are!’ he said, with the impudent audacity of success. ‘Never forget you are on our side—mamma!’

‘Oh, I’ve got to think it all over, Captain De Witt. I am quite confused and upset. And we shall all be late for dinner.’ And she hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

JUDITH'S LOVER.

‘Better it seemed as now to walk,
And humbly by her gentle side,
Observe her smile and hear her talk,
Than call the world's next-best my bride.’

COVENTRY PATMORE.

MISS COLLYER was in the breakfast-room at the usual hour next morning, but she was alone. All the other members of the Rolston party, whether ladies or gentlemen, were as yet invisible, and probably engaged in sleeping off the fatigues of the fancy ball of the preceding night. Miss Collyer had refused to go to this ball, although pressed to do so, and had been the only stay-at-home the evening before. Her promised costume of mouldy green and dead leaves

had not come home in time, she said. This morning, therefore, she had the advantage of the others, and was as fresh as usual as she glided round the breakfast room, rearranging flowers in the many different vases. She was still engaged in this occupation, with her back to the door, when some one, walking softly over the thick-piled carpet, came suddenly behind her, and seizing her by the waist, swung her without ceremony round the room in a rapid waltz.

‘Oh, it’s you, mad boy, of course!’ she exclaimed, as she followed in step, laughing; ‘haven’t you had enough of that last night?’

He finished the turn without speaking, swinging her into her place at the head of the table, and seating himself beside her.

‘Now for the coffee and scones,’ he said. ‘Miss Collyer, I’m as hungry as ten hunters.’

‘Barry, what is the matter with you?’

What are you beaming at me like that for? and why do you contemplate the cups and saucers with such a loving smile? Are you going mad, my boy?’

‘Not going, but gone, Miss Judy. Who wouldn’t beam at such a delicious combination of comforts as breakfast and you together?’

Aunt Judith passed him his cup of coffee in silence, but after a moment she burst out—

‘Oh, Barry, I *must* speak!’

‘Speak out, revered auntie; speak now, or for ever hold your peace!’

‘Barry, it has come all right!’

‘Now, you little ferret, however did you find out there was anything to come right?’

‘I’ve known it ever since the first evening. Of course I saw it at once. Women are not like men, Barry; they can see things under their nose—not only those that are

half a mile off. Tell me all quick. Are you engaged to her ?'

'I am engaged to her, and it is all right, sapient little aunt.'

'My darling boy !'

'There, you are upsetting all the coffee-cups, Aunt Judy, and disarranging my back hair. And I've got to think of my personal appearance now, you know.'

'Oh, Barry ! I have been so unhappy for you all these days. And I knew I mustn't speak a word ; but my heart ached for you. How was it all—why did things go wrong ?'

'There had been a misunderstanding, Aunt Judy—four months ago, when we met abroad. I don't quite understand it myself ; and what's the good of trying now, when everything is all right ? I'm quite content with matters as they are.'

'You are a good deal more than content, my old boy ! Oh, Barry, I hope she is worthy of you.'

‘You foolish little person! Put the query the other way round, and you will be nearer the mark.’

‘I like her, Barry.’

‘You’d better! Another cup of coffee and two more risolles, ma’am.’

‘Barrington, how unromantic you are! Lovers shouldn’t be hungry.’

‘If you don’t hold your tongue, I shall dance you round the room again. And you are not to tell any one of this, Aunt Judy. She does not wish it known here.’

‘As if you could hide it from anybody! An owl could have guessed it last night from your two transmogrified faces. And as if I should tell any one!’

‘You might have told Simon perhaps, in confidence. You confide a good deal in Simon, don’t you, Miss Collyer?’

To which Miss Collyer replied by maintaining a cool and dignified silence.

Three more halcyon days there were for

the lovers—days which need not be described, since their happiness was of that kind which to any one who needs a description of it would be incomprehensible. Suffice it to say that to each of the two, neither of whom had been engaged before, there came a naïve surprise—to Nell, the consciousness of her own power of loving, and to Barrington, the discovery of the unreserved confidence, the singular humility of one he had at first thought proud and self-restrained. Nell Lingwood, his sweetheart, was so utterly different a character from Miss Lingwood, his acquaintance; having once confessed her love for him, no fear, no criticism, no reserve seemed possible to her. She seemed to live for and in him, and to disquiet herself over nothing, scarcely to think of anything else, so long as he remained hers; and De Witt, loving her deeply and truly as he did, was half frightened and wholly touched by the simplicity

of her devotion. No wonder she had been cautious and alarmed at first, timid and half repelled before the advent of love, if she knew herself capable of such intensity of feeling.

As for Nell herself, short as had been the new term of her happiness, it already seemed to her as if the whole of her previous life had been a colourless dream, and as if she had never really lived till now. What had she done before this thing happened to her? how had she borne that cold waste of vapid existence, self-centred and emotionless, before the birth of the new life, when self became extinguished, and every thought of the present, every hope of the future was fixed upon another? None but herself would ever know the sudden transition her heart had experienced during those last few days, from a dull, despairing regret, to a perfect fulness of content. She had no shame upon this

point; she acknowledged it freely to her own mind; she would perhaps have acknowledged it also to Barrington, only that, whenever she began to speak of those dark, uncertain days, he invariably smothered the confession in kisses.

But she told him she had never loved before; and he believed it, watching the soft new glow of the love-light in her eyes, the new sweetness of her dimpling smile, and the tender silence and abstraction of her manner when in general company.

Perhaps, strange to say, it was not a very different matter with him; for, except a boyish fancy or two, passing too quickly to take root, his heart had never been really touched before. And it was now his time to thank God, that, whatever his life had been in other ways—conformed more or less to the general standard of his age and time—yet that on one point perhaps it had not been ‘as other men are,’ and that no

record of shame in the past lay upon his mind to cast a shadow over the brightness of the pure love of to-day—a record which some might strive to forget, some to condone, some to regret, but which none could wipe out.

The engagement between the two was kept secret during those three days; at least, it was intended to be so, but it is probable that few of the party in the house but suspected something of the truth. Aunt Judith, however, the one exception to the rule, showed her usual prompt and sympathetic interest in the matter, and was speedily installed as mutual confidante, whilst an intimate and affectionate friendship sprang up betwixt Nell and herself. She was the best and most tactful of assistants in a love affair ever seen; she could plan arrangements by which the two could be together, with the most barefaced ingenuousness of manner

and unconsciousness of look, and conceal their prolonged absences from the general circle by the most artful of tactics.

And yet Miss Collyer was not without a little secret anxiety of her own, which weighed upon her mind this last day or two of her visit, and even lost her some hours' sleep. But she dismissed it loyally from her mind as she came down to breakfast this last morning, prepared somehow or other to adjust matters so that Barrington and his *fiancée* should have one long walk together before they parted. It was rather difficult to manage this without attracting public attention, and the lovers had to wait; but Judith—who had all through her visit acted, by request of the host, somewhat in the character of lady hostess—having bid adieu to several parties of guests, found herself at last able to leave the house for a stroll, arm in arm with her friend, Miss Lingwood. Needless

to say, they had no sooner turned the corner of the shrubbery before they were joined by De Witt; and, equally needless to say, at the next corner, Miss Collyer retraced her steps. She was just in time to receive the farewells of the last couple, whom Sir Simon was escorting to their carriage with his habitual courtesy of manner. When he returned, she was standing alone by the drawing-room fireplace; for Mrs. Brereton had retired upstairs to superintend the packing of her boxes.

It was rather a chilly morning, and a cheery fire blazed upon the hearth. As Judith Collyer stood beside it, one foot upon the fender, her face looked thoughtful; and as her host re-entered, she started a little. Her mind had been busy with thoughts of the lovers whom she had but just quitted, perhaps also with other thoughts; and Sir Simon and the present moment were far away.

He drew an easy-chair up to the fireplace.

‘Won’t you sit down?’ he asked.

‘No, thanks, Simon; I must be going upstairs to take off my things.’

‘Don’t hurry,’ he said.

‘So all your guests are gone now except the Breretons. Their train is just after lunch, I think.’

‘And Barrington, and you,’ he said.

‘Yes. My cab is ordered at the same time. Well, you have given us a very pleasant week of it, Simon. I think everybody has enjoyed him and herself.’

‘Thanks to you, I think, Judith.’

‘Not at all thanks to me. You are a capital host, Simon.’

‘Can’t you stop on a little, Judith? Barrington is staying another night.’

‘Simon, I am astonished at you! Don’t you know it would be against all the proprieties?’

‘Would it?’ he asked absently. Then

he looked up with a sudden access of colour on his quiet, elderly-featured face.

‘Judith, if—if you could ever make up your mind to like me a little—if you could only come for good, you know—’

There was a long pause. Then at length she spoke in a pained voice.

‘Oh, Simon, I am so sorry you have thought of this! I was afraid, the last day or two—’ She in her turn paused.

‘Why, of course,’ he remarked simply; ‘you must have known, Judith, that I have cared for you and wanted to marry you for this long time. But I was afraid there was no hope.’

‘And you would be so much happier married!’ she cried regretfully. ‘Oh, Simon, take a fancy to some one else! Why can’t you? You are so good and kind and true; you ought not to live all alone.’

‘I would rather not,’ he said, with the

same child-like simplicity. 'I am often lonely, and I think I could make a good husband. But I could not take a fancy to any one else. I don't think you know how I love you, Judith; it isn't only this last year or two—I think I have loved you all your life, since you were a little dark-eyed girl, laughing and teasing gawky old Simon, as you called me. But I don't wonder you can't care for me. I am so much older than you.'

'Not so very much, after all, Simon.'

'Fifteen years, I think. And you are so bright, and I am dull and prosy.'

'You are the cleverest friend I have, and I am proud to be noticed by you!'

'I am not half good enough for you, whatever you may say. But if you could have put up with me—'

'Don't, Simon, be so humble! I can't bear to hear you. You are good enough for any one.'

‘But you can’t give me any hope, Judith? I would wait,’ he added, with unconscious pathos, ‘if there were any chance; and not mind anything, if only you could come to think of it in time—although a man over fifty has not much time to lose.’

‘Don’t wait, dear Simon, please don’t. I am so fond of you; but I feel I should never come to it. Find some one else.’

‘Nay, I did not mean that,’ he said quietly. ‘If you won’t have me, Judith, I will remain as I am.’

‘Oh, you mustn’t, Simon! Plenty of people would be proud to have you—women younger and prettier than me.’

‘I don’t want anybody younger,’ he said slowly; ‘and you are the prettiest woman in the world to me, Judith.’

The tears rose to her eyes. ‘I wish—how I wish I could, Simon! Indeed I do value you.’

‘Your life is sometimes lonely, I have

thought, like mine, Judith, though you are so much younger; and that gave me courage to ask you now. Even if you didn't care very much for me, I thought you might think of it some day, perhaps. You would have some one to love you dearly always, and to shield you all your life; and a home where you would be valued and cared for as you ought to be.'

'No, Simon, I would never insult your chivalry by giving you a Yes out of self-interest; you are too true a knight. You are worth a woman's all, and you shall never have the half from me.'

'I would rather have your half than any other woman's all. Remember that, Judith. And, if ever there comes any time of sorrow or loneliness to you, and you feel that—unattractive as I am—my deep devotion will be any comfort, that my love is better than nothing—remember I am always waiting—I shall never change my mind.'

‘What! bring you the dower of a broken-spirited, worn-out woman? Never, Simon!’

He sighed quietly.

‘I shall always be ready,’ he repeated sadly. ‘However you came, whenever you came, I should still rejoice—it would still be the best gift in life to me.’

Judith Collyer held out her hand in silence to him, and he clasped it for a moment in both of his.

‘God bless you, dear Simon, for your kind words,’ she said, after a moment, in a low voice; ‘it is something to feel one has a friend like you in the world.’ And she moved softly out of the room, leaving him standing before the fireplace.

It was many minutes before he stirred; and when at length he did so, he raised one hand and passed it once or twice across his forehead, as if to clear away some slight mist that obscured his vision or his brain.

Then he went out with his usual quiet

step in time to meet Mrs. Brereton in the hall, and to greet her with his accustomed courtesy, expressing the pleasure he had derived from the visit of herself and her daughter, and his sincere hope that it would not be the last with which he should be honoured.

CHAPTER XIII.

NELL DOES BATTLE WITH THE MEN OF HER
HOUSEHOLD.

‘I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark !’

SHAKESPEARE.

BARRINGTON had intended to escort his *fiancée* home, but had been forbidden to do so, and had submitted, although somewhat reluctantly. If a battle of any sort were to be fought, why might he not be there to bear the worst of it, or at any rate to take his share of blows in the affray? But Nell decided otherwise.

‘No,’ she said firmly, in answer to his expostulations, ‘I can manage better alone ; I had rather be by myself. I know papa

will be nasty at first, and I would rather you were not there. It will blow over, I think, very soon, and then you shall come down.'

He guessed one at least of her motives—that she dreaded anything like an irredeemable quarrel between himself and her connections, in consequence of the opposition which she evidently anticipated on their part. Perhaps she was wise, although what right was possessed by the step-father and brother to interfere, if her mother and herself approved, he could not at present perceive. But for her sake he was willing to avoid any unpleasantness of feeling or collision of any kind. For his own, he certainly would not have moved a straw out of the way to preserve the good-fellowship of two of the most uncongenial and unpleasant men he ever remembered encountering.

It was about seven o'clock when Mrs.

Brereton and her daughter reached home, a long drive having succeeded to their railway journey.

The Cedars was a large house built in the modern style, with no pretensions to architecture, but situated in the midst of a lovely country, with fine grounds of its own. The surrounding property, consisting of park and meadow land, a small common, and an extensive wood, was all well preserved, since both Mr. Brereton and his son were fond of sport, which they kept pretty much to themselves, an extra gun being a somewhat rare innovation in the shooting season.

Mrs. Brereton was tired with her journey ; nevertheless, a feeling of nervousness made her conversational, and she entertained her husband and stepson at dinner with long and graphic accounts of Sir Simon's hospitality, to the ringing of whose praises Mr. Brereton had no objection. He considered Sir Simon a pleasant and well-informed

man, and would have accepted his invitation to the late party himself, had it not been for business which had compelled him to be in London just at that time. Robert Lingwood had been asked too,—Sir Simon was too courteous to leave out this young man, for whom he had no partiality whatever,—but he had declined the invitation. Robert did not shine in company; he was not of a genial or sociable disposition, neither had he any accomplishments to gain him popularity. He was, in fact, as a rule, not appreciated; and, like many others of similar disposition, revenged himself by scoffing at society's charms.

It had been agreed upon between the mother and daughter that Nell was to inform her step-father of her engagement after dinner. Mrs. Brereton had wished to postpone the evil moment, and, poor soul, had pleaded hard for one night's peace, but Nell was resolute.

‘If a disagreeable thing has to be done, mother,’ she said, ‘the sooner it is got over the better. Though, for that matter,’ she added, raising her head proudly, ‘I don’t know that even papa’s opposition will greatly affect *my* peace of mind.’

Mrs. Brereton looked at her daughter, and wondered where she had acquired her courage. Certainly it was not hereditary, at least not from her side of the family. Nell, when she was in earnest over anything, could face without flinching anger which would have cowed her, and sneers which would have crushed her. ‘Getting it over’ was not at all her way of looking at the disagreeable and the inevitable; ‘putting it off’ would have been more her line of action.

She was never great at self-possession; and now, with her mind dwelling on the probable storm in store for her that very evening, she grew more and more nervous

and confused, and at last stumbled out the very name she had intended to avoid. At its mere mention there was a moment's ominous pause, rendered all the more perceptible by her own evident embarrassment. It was so much the worse, inasmuch as the dessert was now on the table, and the servants had left the room; so that no motives of prudence or propriety need restrain the tongues she dreaded.

‘Oh,’ said her husband shortly; ‘so Captain De Witt was there, was he? I don’t think you made any mention of him in your letters to me. And yet,’ he added after a moment, during which he had fixed the unhappy, blushing woman with a severe stare, ‘if I remember right, he was a favourite of yours abroad, just the sort of young man you admire—plenty of assurance and not too much brains?’

Saying which, and receiving no coherent reply from his wife, who was floundering

about in a sea of half-uttered disclaimers, he relapsed into silence; and, taking a pear from the dish before him, began to peel it.

But his son was not content without bringing the war into the enemy's camp at once.

'I suppose,' he remarked with an undisguised sneer, turning his eye-glass towards his step-sister, 'that he was busy making up to you all the time, Nell—at the old game?'

Mrs. Brereton gave a frightened glance in her daughter's direction; but Nell, although the crimson colour filled her cheeks, answered him with a quiet scorn that was perfectly calm.

'Your remarks are characterized by their usual refinement,' she said, as she rose from the table to follow her mother.

When, a few minutes later, Mr. Brereton left the dining-room, she followed him into

the library where he usually spent a post-prandial hour.

‘Papa,’ she began abruptly, ‘I have something to tell you.’

He flung the book he had just taken from the shelves upon the table.

‘You needn’t tell me!’ he exclaimed irritably. ‘Do you think I couldn’t see it from your mother’s face? I didn’t think you would be such a fool, Nell!’

‘Papa, hear me out. I am engaged to Captain De Witt.’

‘I told you I knew it! What’s the good of repeating it? I told your mother all along how it would be—I saw you were caught. But one might as well trust the common sense of a rabbit as put faith in your mother!’

‘Why should I not be caught, as you call it?’ asked the girl gravely. ‘What is there about Captain De Witt to make him undesirable? And why should you

have ever tried to set mama against him ?’

‘Oh, I’ve no patience with such folly ! I should have thought by now, Nell, that you might have learnt a wiser lesson.’

She drew nearer to him, and looked at him without anger in her earnest eyes.

‘Papa, I believe you mean kindly by all this. I wish to believe it. I think you really fancy you are saving me from some danger——’

‘Have you already forgotten,’ he interrupted, ‘the fate I saved you from once before ?’

‘No, papa, I have not forgotten it ; and I have been grateful to you for so saving me then. But, because one man is cruel and heartless, do you mean to tell me that truth does not exist in the world ?’

‘I mean to tell you that an infatuated girl who has lost her heart to a good-looking fellow, is totally incapable of discriminating.

Who can judge in their own cause—above all, a silly woman in love? Pah!’—and Mr. Brereton snorted angrily.

‘Papa, I wish to be patient; do not make me lose my temper. You are my trustee, and were my guardian, so that I feel I ought to consult you in everything as much as I can, even if you were not mama’s husband. But is it fair to condemn a man against whom you know absolutely nothing, simply from prejudice, born, I think, of a sort of universal suspicion you have contracted against all unmarried men?’

‘I know absolutely nothing of the fellow in any way; neither do you, Eleanor. Has he’—with another snort—‘informed you of his income?’

‘No, papa; men don’t make love by telling their *fiancées* how many hundreds or thousands a year they have. They leave that till they see the male relations, I believe. But we know everything about—

him. You cannot say he is a stranger to you, when you know that he is a cousin of your old friend, Sir Simon.'

'Well, as you make your own bed, so you will have to lie on it. I can't prevent you cutting your own throat, if it pleases you to do so. But I'm sorry for you. It won't be long before you will rue it.'

'Papa, I shall never rue marrying the man I care for. I am quite determined, and no opposition can make me change my mind; but, for the sake of peace and good feeling, I would have liked to mitigate your prejudices. But, when you have seen him and talked to him, you will perhaps think differently.'

'Never—never!' he exclaimed. 'Fair words are uncommonly easy—especially to men of that stamp. But, go your own way, Eleanor, go your own way, until it leads you over the precipice!'

His step-daughter could bear no more.

She had reached the utmost limits of her patience ; and she hurried from the room with burning cheeks and a heart beating fast with repressed indignation.

Meanwhile Mrs. Brereton had been having a very *mauvais quart d'heure* in the drawing-room with her amiable step-son, Robert. Had Nell known of his presence, and of the conversation that had taken place between her mother and himself, she certainly would not have returned thither. But in fact, the young man finding his step-mother alone, and discovering that Nell was closeted with his father in the library, guessed rapidly at the truth, which he soon succeeded in confirming from the lips of the elder lady. She was too weak to stand against a verbal persecution ; and after all, since Nell was informing the father, what need to conceal the fact from the son, his confidant ?

So Robert soon possessed himself of her

secret, managing to worm out of her a good many details; after which he treated her to his unvarnished opinion upon the subject, in language equally unvarnished. The young man's language could be strong at times, when there was no restraining presence by; and he was not in the habit of softening its force before Mrs. Brereton.

But he paused as Nell entered the room. Nell was a different person from her mother; Nell had a high spirit and quick speech; and she had sometimes given him glances from her full dark eyes, or cutting words from her well-chiselled lips, that, thick-skinned as he was, had penetrated through his armour of self-assurance and stung him pretty deeply. So he held his tongue now, sulkily—but she was too absorbed to notice that—longing, yet fearing, to rouse her by some angry comment.

But it was impossible to him to restrain his ill-temper long; and when she rose to

go to bed, bidding him a careless 'good-night,' it broke forth into words.

'Why don't you ask me for congratulations?' he inquired, with a sneer.

'Because you would not give me them,' she replied, half-wearily; for her battle in the library and all the mingled emotions of the day had almost exhausted her.

But the gentleness of her manner only encouraged him to proceed to further lengths.

'Didn't I tell you he was a fortune-hunter,' he asked, 'as well as a prig? How angry you were! But you have found out now that your disinterested friend was making love all the time—blind as you are—I suppose?'

He stood in her way to the door, and she waved him aside, as she turned her blazing eyes for a moment towards him.

'Robert Lingwood,' she said, 'you can leave Captain De Witt's name alone, if you

please. I am not going to discuss my affairs with you—disinterested as *you* are!’

This was a new shot, and for an instant he flinched beneath its thrust; but he ventured upon a retaliation.

‘No,’ he remarked, ‘he can manage all your affairs for you now, can’t he? I don’t suppose he’ll have any objection—fine gentleman as he is.’

Nell turned at the doorway. Woman-like, though wearied out, she could not resist the last word.

‘Yes,’ she retorted, with quiet scorn, ‘you are quite right—he *is* a gentleman; which you will never be, if you live to be a hundred, Robert.’

And she hurried up-stairs—humiliated, angry, sore at heart, to lock her bed-room door and hide her face in her hands. Why was she forced to have her habitation with such as this man was? How disgusted, how wearing, how unbearable was his very

presence—his coarse speeches, and low suspicious thoughts. How had she ever borne the degradation for so long?

And then the tender tears filled her eyes, and sinking upon her knees, she thanked God for the love of a man, who, liable to human failing as he might be, was upright, sincere, and simple-minded—one to whom a low and suspicious thought was, she believed, impossible, and to whom coarse and unlovely language to a woman would have been a thing unnatural and detestable.

CHAPTER XIV.

‘THE CONDITION OF YOUR PECUNIARY
AFFAIRS.’

‘How blest the humble cottar’s fate,
He woos his simple dearie ;
The silly bogles, wealth and state,
Can never make them eerie !’—BURNS.

It was the early afternoon of a lovely September day as Barrington left the train at the little station of Cotswold Moors, and, sending his portmanteau to the village inn, set out to walk the three or four miles distance to the Cedars. In this primitive spot a vehicle was not to be procured without warning ; and, too impatient to wait, he determined to make his way on foot. It was a decision which he found no cause to

regret, as, in the peculiar soft balminess of a fine autumnal day, he turned briskly down the indicated road, under noble elm-trees shading undulating stretches of richest pasture-land, and in sight of distant purple hills, misty with the mid-day sun.

He had not delayed long after receiving Nell’s letter that morning—a letter of half-wavering permission, rather than of cordial invitation for his visit to her home. The poor girl was not quite sure whether she had done wisely now in telling him to come, and certainly did not expect that he would have acted so promptly upon the permission. But the intuition that it was possible she might by the next post revoke her words, caused Barrington to be off at once. The week that had already passed since parting with his *fiancée* had been a long one; he desired to see Mr. Brereton and understand the position of affairs, and chafed at the idea of being kept out of the

way until Nell had smoothed matters into shape. He was more at his ease now than he had been all the week, and whistled as he went along the solitary road. He had no wish, however, unnecessarily to lengthen his walk; and, as he was not quite sure that the direction he had taken was the right one, he presently paused and looked about him for sight of a homestead or a wayfarer.

Homestead there appeared to be none, within any reasonable distance at least; but a wayfarer presently came in sight, and one who was sure to know the country—since he was a sportsman with a gun over his shoulder. On nearer approach he seemed to be a gamekeeper—a heavy, big young man, with a somewhat sullen face, and dark, passionate-looking eyes. He was civil enough, however, when accosted, and at once pointed out the path to the stranger.

‘Do you want to go to the house itself, sir?’ he asked. ‘Well then, you had better return a few yards, and cross the stile where you saw me come over. That path will lead you to the wood. You must go on past the cottage at the outskirts of it till you come to an iron fence and gateway; and that will lead you into the park itself.’

Barrington thanked him and went on, noticing as he neared the cottage, a singularly pretty girl, who emerged from the wood, and after a moment’s blushing pause, dropped him a curtsy and disappeared through the doorway. A few minutes later he was beside the iron gate, and, as he opened it, perceived in front of him a figure slouching forwards with a gait he seemed to recognize. As the gate fell to with a sharp click, the figure turned, revealing the features of Robert Brereton. His face expressed some astonishment, but little

cordiality ; and had it been possible, he would probably have walked on without recognizing the other.

Their eyes, however, had met, and he was forced to stand still and offer some sort of greeting as the other came up. Barrington held out his hand frankly, and the young man was obliged to take it in his limp fingers. To De Witt's mind he was the veriest little cad that could well be picked up on a day's journey ; but he was Nell's step-brother, and therefore to be treated civilly, even if it had not been natural to the former to treat every one with a good-humoured tolerance.

‘Are you going my way—towards the house?’ he asked, as he dropped into line with young Brereton.

‘Well, yes, I'm going home. I didn't know you were coming over,’ he added slowly.

‘No more did I until this morning. I

am coming to pay a short visit only. I shall return to the inn and sleep there. I hope your father is in?’

‘Well, yes, I believe the governor is in.’

‘What a fine park this is!’

‘It’s not bad.’

‘Have you much game about?’

‘Pretty fair.’

‘I met a lovely girl coming out of the wood, who went into the cottage just there. Who is she?’

‘She’s Barrett the gamekeeper’s daughter.’

‘It was a gamekeeper—a young man—who showed me the way from the high road. Is he another friend of yours?’

‘Will Barrett—the son, I suppose,’ replied Robert; and Barrington, suddenly catching sight of his features, saw a deep scowl passing over them. It was clear that the young gamekeeper was no favourite with his companion.

Conversation, however—at no time one

of Robert Brereton's accomplishments—seemed more than ever to fail him to-day; and presently also De Witt, feeling that he had done his duty, relapsed into a silence which lasted until they had reached the house.

Barrington had been uncertain whether to ask first for Nell, or to go at once to business with her step-father; consequently he felt somewhat relieved when the man who opened the door, volunteered the information that the ladies were out driving together, but that the latter was in his library, alone.

Accordingly, he sent in his card; and shortly afterwards following it, was ushered into Mr. Brereton's presence. His welcome, he could not but feel, was a little stiff; but that he had expected. There were no doubt many reasons why that gentleman should find it hard to look with eyes of favour upon his step-daughter's suitor—not the least perhaps, being the fact that, on

her marriage, he would be a loser by the thousand pounds a year allowed for her home expenses—but that might wear off, or if it did not, amounted to but little. No doubt Nell was an heiress—how great he neither knew nor cared—and, being a man to whom the notion of living on his wife’s money is unpalatable, Barrington considered that fact in the light of a misfortune; but he was by no means penniless himself, and had, even now, enough to keep a wife in comfort, if not in luxury; so that he felt in no whit ashamed of himself, nor inclined to be cowed by any want of cordiality.

‘You know what I have come about, Mr. Brereton?’ he said, so soon as the door had closed upon the servant.

The latter motioned him gravely, almost sententiously, towards a chair.

‘Well, yes, Captain De Witt—I suppose I must admit that I do.’

‘Pompous old beggar!’ thought De Witt

to himself; but aloud he continued, good-humouredly,—

‘I should have liked to come at once and talk over matters with you, but your step-daughter wished me to wait.’

‘Yes—yes,’ muttered Mr. Brereton in the same manner; ‘she has told me something of the—the views which you—and she—entertain towards one another.’

‘Well,’ said Barrington; ‘and now, if you will permit me, I will tell you more—tell you in fact anything you may choose to ask—for, as her late guardian, you of course take the place of her late father.’

‘And as her present trustee,’ interrupted the other dryly.

‘True, as her trustee also. But I shall not give you much trouble on that head, I hope, Mr. Brereton. I don’t know what is Nell’s fortune—I have never cared to inquire—but I believe it is considerable. Whatever it is, however, you have my full

consent to settle it in its entirety upon her personally—I shall never want to touch it.’

‘That is a generous proposal,’ remarked the elder man; and Barrington fancied he detected a flavour of sarcasm in his tone.

‘Well, you see, it is Nell herself that I want, not her money.’

‘That is what young men usually say, when they are—in love.’

Barrington was beginning to grow impatient, and, without taking any notice of this last remark, he plunged into business details, regarding his own affairs and prospects. His companion, he could see, was listening attentively; but at the end made no comment.

‘So you see, Mr. Brereton, I have a sufficiency to offer your step-daughter now, although I hope to have a better home for her some day.’

‘Your affairs appear to me to be some-

what involved,' replied his companion. 'Is not your income more in the future than the present, Captain De Witt?'

'Not at all,' said Barrington; 'I consider that my means are enough to satisfy any woman who loves me, although I may not be a rich man.'

'Possibly, Captain De Witt; but perhaps not enough to satisfy her guardians, who are bound to look more closely after her welfare than she is likely or able to do herself. Pardon me; but you must allow me to think over this matter. You are not the first suitor I have had for Eleanor's hand.'

'Of course not. But perhaps I am the first she herself has chosen?'

'That does not—ought not to weigh so much with me as you seem to think. I am bound, as the trustee of her interests, to be very prudent, very cautious for her.'

'I am willing to wait and let you think

it over, Mr. Brereton, if you wish for time to get accustomed to the idea; but I am bound to tell you that I shall not change my purpose, nor can I see any reasonable grounds for your objections.’

‘Captain De Witt, you must pardon me. I have gone through a great deal of this sort of thing. I have sometimes wished,’ he continued, with irritation half-real, half-assumed, ‘that I could wash my hands wholly of the burden of it all. A girl handsome and rich is a great responsibility. Excuse me if I say that men with greater pretensions than you have, before now, been considered ineligible for my step-daughter, Eleanor, by her mother and myself.’

‘Do her own inclinations go for nothing, then?’

‘She is young and impulsive. She is totally unfit to steer her own course, both on account of her age and disposition.’

‘Well, Mr. Brereton, I do but waste your time and words. I should be glad to have your approbation, and hope that it may come in time. Perhaps you will write to me in the course of a few days when you have thought things over; and I shall be very glad to come down at any time from town, if you wish to see me again.’

And with the stiffest and coldest of hand-shakes from his companion, Barrington got himself out of the room, breathing a sigh of relief when once outside that uncongenial atmosphere.

What a mercy that he had not lost his temper! He had been perilously near doing so more than once; but fortunately nature had endowed him with a naturally easy-going and placable disposition. He would have been sorry openly to quarrel with his *fiancée’s* step-father, little as he cottoned to that prim and fussy individual.

But he was not going to depart without

a sight of Nell’s sweet face ; and hearing from the servant that they had just returned from their drive, he had himself ushered into the empty drawing-room, boldly sending up a card to both ladies.

In a moment Nell was down, holding his hands in hers, standing before him, blushing, smiling—with radiant eyes, and a face full of happiness. She had had a trying week, but it was all forgotten in his presence.

‘I never knew you were here,’ she whispered, when at length he released her. ‘Oh, Barrington, how naughty of you to come without telling me!’

‘Did you think I was going to wait any longer?’ he asked, impudently. ‘I thought I came down to see your step-father ; but now I know I came down for a sight of you, my darling ! Nell, Nell, what a sweet, lovely child you are !—you turn my head when I look at you. How have I done without a kiss for a whole week ?’

‘Oh, Barrington, don’t! I think you are going crazy! And what *has* papa said to you? He *couldn’t*, surely, be *very* nasty to you?’

‘Never mind him; he will work right, Nell; he must work right.’

‘He is so hard—so cold and calculating, Barrington; you don’t know.’

‘But, my dear little girl, he can’t prevent us marrying, if it comes to facts. And he is wiser than to fight long against the inevitable. You are your own mistress.’

‘But it would make me very miserable, Barrington dear, to do anything without their sanction. I don’t care much for papa, I know; but poor mama—she is bound up in him, and she can’t bear going against him. She couldn’t do it—and yet she hates vexing me. Poor mother!’

‘We will get our own way in time,’ he repeated. ‘Is it too late, Nell, for pretty little girls to go out walking? I could talk so much better out of the house.’

‘I will come. Oh, it does seem hard that I cannot even ask you to spend the night here!’

‘Never mind, dear. I dare say the village bed won’t be harder than the Capri one. And I will come round this way in the morning, in case a certain fair damsel should be out, and feel inclined for an early stroll in the park—say at ten o’clock, or thereabouts? That will give me plenty of time to catch the mid-day train.’

‘Of course I will be ready. But it seems so horrid to have to meet in that way, like——’

‘Like Jeames and Mary, or a couple of intending burglars? It *is infra dig*. But then, it is our own choice, you know. I presume Mr. Brereton would not order his menials to thrust me from the seigneurial door, were I to ring the bell; nor, I suppose, could any one prevent your receiving me like any other visitor in the drawing-room.’

‘True,’ she said, a little sadly.

‘We are neither of us the least ashamed of ourselves ; are we, Nell ?’

‘Ashamed ! Oh, Barrington, I am proud—proud of your caring for me—so proud of you yourself. I don’t think you ever could do a mean or ignoble thing—you must always be a gentleman.’

‘Well, a gentleman isn’t so very scarce an article now-a-days, I hope, as you seem to imply, Nell.’

‘A perfect gentleman is very rare, I think, Barrington. One who would never be rough to a woman, or domineering to those in his power ; never sneering, never sarcastic. You could never do any of those things, Barrington ! I think you would always be courteous to me, however long we—knew each other.’

‘If I weren’t, I should be a brute, my darling. But don’t make a hero out of a terribly commonplace fellow.’

‘There was a time when I distrusted every one, you know, Barrington. I don’t

think it was my nature; but it was impressed upon me daily to be suspicious. But now I look upon every one more kindly—not only because I am so happy, but because I have learnt to trust. It has taught me to feel that there may be good in every one.’

‘Even in Robert, Nell?’

‘Yes, perhaps—even in Robert. I have tried to be more patient, even with him, the last few days.’

‘And if I were to disappoint you, Nell, would your heart then harden up to the world at large, and would your faith in human nature die a sudden, violent death?’

She paused a moment. Then she raised her full clear eyes to his, shining with the light of an earnest conviction.

‘Even then, Barrington, I could never be the same as I was before—I could never be so hard again. I should feel that you had loved me once, that I had once been proud of you—and no after events could

destroy that knowledge. But,' she added softly, 'you never will disappoint me—I shall always be proud of you.'

He put his arm round her silently, for he was moved; and like the men of our northern race, had an incapacity at such times for the finding of words to express himself.

But he knew not then how those words of hers would be tested to their foundation, not so many weeks hence; nor how they would then recur to him again and again, in mingled remorse and consolation, as he drank of the cup of human agony, and went down to the depths of the valley of humiliation.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 045842553